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Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 633

A study of language and communication between advisers and claimants in Work Focused Interviews

Paul Drew, Merran Toerien, Annie Irvine and Roy Sainsbury

A report of research carried out by the Social Policy Research Unit and the Department of sociology/the Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication and at the University of York on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Summary

Aims and approach

This report presents findings of an in-depth, qualitative study of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) taking place in Jobcentre Plus offices and Employment Zones (EZs). The research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and conducted between May 2007 and May 2009 by researchers in the Social Policy Research Unit and the Department of Sociology/the Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication at the University of York.

The principal aims were to:

- contribute to the evidence base regarding what actually takes place in WFIs;
- identify those techniques and styles used by advisers during WFIs that seemed to be most effective in moving people closer to work;
- make recommendations concerning effective practice in WFIs, for three main claimant groups.

The study utilised audio and video recordings of real interactions between personal advisers (PAs) and claimants. Thus, the findings are based upon a precise record of what actually takes place during WFIs. Our focus throughout has been on advisers' **communication strategies, styles or techniques** for managing the various **tasks** that comprise each of the distinct WFI types recorded for this study. These recordings include the following claimant groups:

- lone parents claiming Income Support (IS);
- people claiming a benefit related to ill health or disability; and
- people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) while unemployed.

Using the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA), we examined all instances of particular interactional activities in order to identify the different techniques advisers use in their day to day work. We then tracked whether the interaction proceeded differently when one or another technique was used. Our aim was to see which techniques were **demonstrably** more effective at helping claimants move closer to the labour market – within the WFI itself.

Indicators of effectiveness for this study needed, therefore, to be internal to the interaction if we were to address the study's objectives. We focused especially on claimants' responses to advisers' strategies because positive or conducive responses are signs of – and preconditions for – progression during the WFI along the journey to work. By contrast, negative or resistive responses tend to delay or block such progress. By focusing both on the differences in how advisers manage WFI tasks (like asking questions or delivering information) and on how claimants respond to these different strategies, we have a method for assessing directly what 'makes the difference' during the WFI itself (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of our approach to understanding effectiveness in these interviews).

A caveat about our sample size: our observations and findings are based on recordings of a little over 180 WFIs, made in eight Jobcentre Plus offices and two EZs across four regions of England. This is a relatively large sample for an in-depth qualitative study of communication techniques, but a relatively small sample of the many hundreds of thousands of WFIs conducted across the country each week. However, any limitations there may be in terms of the representativeness of – and hence the evidence base provided by – our sample do not affect the (principal) aim of this study, which was to identify what works best – to identify effective practice in WFIs by comparing the different verbal techniques PAs use. Moreover, we should emphasise that when we have presented these findings to DWP/Jobcentre Plus stakeholders, they have recognised the picture we draw of WFIs as essentially correct and valid.

Principal findings on effective practice for specific Jobcentre Plus claimant groups

NJIs with JSA 18-24 and 25+ claimants (see Chapter 3)

- When advisers asked about a claimant's job goals, effective practice consisted in phrasing the enquiry in a more open-ended, claimant-focused format (e.g. 'What would you like to do?').
- Taking a claimant-focused approach to job goals typically involved encouraging claimants to think fully about job goals; to help claimants match their goals to their qualifications, experience and aptitudes; and to choose second and third job goals which, whilst being realistic, were also related – preferably as stepping stones – to their main goal.
- When asking claimants about their job goals, advisers sometimes took the view that some job goals were unrealistic – without having first explored this explicitly with the claimant. Effective practice consisted in asking relevant questions (e.g. if claimants knew of local vacancies or had already made any applications) to establish the realism of claimants' goals, rather than making assumptions.

- When talking about job search strategies, advisers commonly provided information in a standardised way that did not address claimants' individual needs. A more effective approach was to tailor information to an individual claimant, by first learning more about, for instance, what they had already done to look for work.
- By framing their explanations of job search strategies around the conditionality of receiving benefit, advisers tended often to minimise what claimants were expected to do to search for and find work. Effective practice involved discussing with claimants the difficulties they had experienced with previous job search strategies, and ways in which they could be more pro-active in searching for work.
- Explicitly inviting claimants to commit to taking specific steps towards work was more effective than simply telling them about job search options.
- Conducting a job search with the claimant provided an opportunity to give claimant-focused, tailored instruction and encouragement, including the support they needed to make suitable applications.

Initial WFIs with IB claimants in Pathways to Work areas (see Chapter 4)

- Despite having received a letter and (usually) a telephone call, IB claimants often remained uncertain about the purpose of the interview. IBPAs frequently struggled to provide clear explanations at the start of the WFI. In overcoming this difficulty, explanations seemed most effective when they conformed to three principles: **simplicity, staging and tailoring**.
- IBPAs' accounts of the agenda for the initial WFI were complicated by the fact that they did not know yet whether or not the claimant would be screened in for the Pathways programme; they therefore had difficulty in explaining which aspects of Pathways WFIs were mandatory and which were voluntary. Our findings support the policy decision to remove the need to use a screening tool.
- IBPAs often did not emphasise – at least, in their opening explanations – the real opportunities Pathways to Work offered. They did not 'sell' Pathways; rather they conveyed, particularly when announcing the screening result, that Pathways was something of a 'penalty'. By contrast, the news that the claimant had been screened in was more effectively presented as offering the claimant **an opportunity** to receive further help and support. Although the screening tool is no longer in use, the value of using the 'language of opportunity', rather than of penalty and imposition, is applicable to any occasion where advisers are informing claimants of voluntary programmes.
- IBPAs' attempts to focus on claimants' plans or intentions to return to work were frequently 'deflected' by claimants, who took these enquiries as further opportunities to elaborate on their medical conditions or other complaints (for example, about their treatment by an employer or agency).

- IBPAs tended, in these initial interviews, to focus on gathering and giving information, resulting in the postponement of further steps towards work until some point in the future (subsequent meetings, if screened in, or until the health condition had been resolved). In some cases this meant they missed opportunities to respond positively to claimants' expressions of interest in the possibility of re-training. Effective practice consisted in talking with claimants about the steps towards work they might take in the meantime – even if a return to work was not imminent.

Mandatory initial and review WFIs with lone parents claiming Income Support (see Chapter 5)

- In initial WFIs, claimants generally responded to the results of a Better Off Calculation (BOC) in a non-committal or 'negative' manner (however much better off they would be). BOCs appear to receive more positive responses, however, in review meetings. The key difference seems to lie in claimants' job-readiness: if claimants are already seeking work (or about to do so), the BOC can help contribute towards an increased work focus; if not, the BOC does not appear to encourage claimants to **begin** to think about returning to work. Effective practice may lie, then, in enabling advisers to use BOCs flexibly, depending on the claimant's circumstances.
- Explanations of better-off calculations were most effective when tailored to claimants' particular circumstances and **how they might help claimants** (and not as something '*we have to do*').
- Information about programmes, assistance and benefits available, was often not **tailored** to what the claimant had said about their circumstances. Claimants responded more positively to information that related or was fitted to their work aspirations, or childcare needs.
- Claimants' answers to an initial enquiry did not always fully or accurately reflect their circumstances or childcare needs. Subsequent follow-up questions, perhaps approaching the matter from a different angle, sometimes elicited more positive and fruitful responses.
- When enquiries about claimants' work plans were framed around whether they were looking for work **at the present**, claimant's responses were typically negative. By contrast, when the same enquiry was framed around intentions **for the future**, the response was generally positive. The latter provided a more conducive environment in which to go on to discuss steps towards work.
- Even if claimants indicated initially that they were not actively seeking work, it was possible to move the discussion on to goals for the future, and then consider what preparation might be necessary to achieve those goals. Framing plans for the future provided an opportunity, then, for advisers to encourage claimants to consider work as something for which they may need **to prepare** themselves, even if they were not yet ready for work.

- By using positive and constructive reformulations of claimants' rather negative views about their interest in and likelihood of finding work, advisers can open up opportunities to discuss future work plans (work related openings).
- An 'information only' approach was less successful in 'caseloading' claimants than combining information provision with an explicit invitation to claimants to consider participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Findings on effective practice across the claimant groups

Process-led and claimant-focused approaches to tasks in WFIs (see Chapter 7)

A principal theme running through many of these findings – cutting across the different claimant groups – concerns the extent to which advisers performed tasks in ways that were **process-led**, or which took into account the circumstances, needs and accounts of a particular claimant, i.e. were **claimant-focused**.

This distinction applied particularly to gathering and giving information. When advisers gathered information according to a checklist provided by questions on the screen, and entered that information in ways that excluded or were opaque to claimants, they were adopting a process-led approach. By contrast, when they asked more open questions inviting the claimant's 'story', and involved claimants in playing an active role in recording this information, they were more claimant-focused. Likewise, when advisers provided information and advice about the steps claimants might take towards work, and the incentives, programmes and work-directed services that were available, they mainly did this in a standardised fashion; less often, they tailored the information to the individual claimant's circumstances and needs. Our findings suggest that a more tailored approach to information provision is more effective in engaging claimants and encouraging them to take steps towards work.

The distinction between process-led and claimant-focused was also associated with whether advisers simply delivered the relevant information (for example about how a claimant might search for work or what support was available); or whether they provided information and explicitly invited the claimant to commit to performing some activity, thereby seeking their commitment to taking steps towards work. In general, a process-led approach tended to be associated with advisers minimising what claimants were expected to do in order to become job ready. By contrast, a claimant-focused approach was typically associated with advisers seeking to encourage claimants to think constructively (and aspirationally) about their future employment.

Our findings do not, however, support the exclusive adoption of one or other of these approaches. There is no evidence that adviser conduct would be more effective if they were only and always claimant-focused; it seems that some combination of these approaches might necessarily be adopted by advisers,

depending on the task they are managing. Nonetheless, there is evidence that advisers were more likely to **miss opportunities** to support claimants when they adopted a predominantly process-led approach. It seems that advisers sometimes missed opportunities when they:

- spent relatively little time soliciting the claimant's 'story';
- gave (further) information about programmes and schemes that were available in a relatively 'formulaic' manner (i.e. not tailored to an individual's circumstances), rather than explicitly inviting or actively soliciting the claimant's participation in a programme;
- adopted a 'wait and see' attitude – effectively postponing taking active steps towards work until later ('later' might include subsequent meetings; or until the claimant's circumstances changed).

Adviser style (see Chapter 6)

Our comparison of WFIs in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices highlighted the importance of certain key aspects of adviser style that run through all WFIs, with all claimant groups. Advisers were demonstrably more effective when they were more:

- **collaborative** in their approach to the interview, treating the relationship with the claimant as a partnership;
- **directive** – guiding the interview agenda, and providing explicit instruction to claimants on a range of practical matters, such as CV construction, what to wear to an interview, how to answer interview questions, and how to find suitable childcare;
- **proactive** – pursuing employment and training opportunities there and then during the interview, and ensuring that they followed claimants up (e.g. with a phone call later in the week);
- **positive** about the claimant, for example highlighting marketable skills;
- **challenging** – requiring claimants to engage actively in job seeking, and encouraging them to think differently about their situation.

Although these features were more characteristic of EZ interviews, they were also evident to some extent in Jobcentre Plus WFIs; indeed, they are closely related to the claimant-focused approach, which was identified on the basis of our analysis of adviser practices in Jobcentre Plus alone. Thus, although the broader institutional context is very different for advisers working in Jobcentre Plus and the EZ, our findings suggest that many of the effective interactional strategies commonly seen in EZ interviews are transferrable to – and indeed already used in – Jobcentre Plus WFIs.

Specific, cross-cutting recommendations

It is common for interactional skills training – in a range of institutional settings – to offer guidance about **general** communication skills. Our findings add to those guidelines **a greater level of detail** about what advisers actually say and do in the effective performance of WFI tasks. In order to highlight this detail, we provide (in Chapter 8) a sample of recommendations with illustrative examples. Although some of the content relates to specific claimant groups, the strategies themselves are transferrable across different WFI types.

Policy messages

The main output of this study has been findings and recommendations concerning those techniques and styles employed by advisers during WFIs that seem to be most effective in moving people closer to work. We were not asked to address policy issues, and it would perhaps be inappropriate for us to suggest direct policy implications arising from this study.

Nevertheless there are perhaps messages for policy in what we report here. Our findings and recommendations connect closely with and support DWP's ongoing review of how best to improve the quality of its advisory service, with the Department's Strategic Objective (DS07) to be an exemplar in effective service delivery. Changes are being introduced to give frontline advisers a greater degree of flexibility over the timing and content of some WFIs, and to tailor services as far as possible to the individual claimant. Many of our findings and recommendations address those matters, especially with respect to:

- the difficulty advisers sometimes have in balancing matters of the conditionality associated with benefit entitlement, with offering personalised advice and support, for instance when explaining what is mandatory and what is voluntary;
- the drive to offer tailor-made, individualised advice and support to claimants. There is evidence that for certain aspects of what is covered in WFIs a claimant-focused approach – e.g. tailoring information provision; exploring more fully a claimant's previous work experience and work opportunities; avoiding jumping to conclusions about what is and is not a realistic job goal; fitting job goals to a claimant's training, experience and aspirations; exploring fully a claimant's childcare needs and preferences – is more effective. More generally, an approach that is content to 'tick the boxes' may detract from exploring issues fully with claimants;
- adviser training, and DWP/Jobcentre Plus approaches to learning and development. Wherever possible, our report specifies and recommends forms of words, techniques and strategies at a considerable level of detail, suitable for inclusion in training programmes;

Although our report offers recommendations about effective practice, recommendations aimed at enhancing advisers' professionalism and the service they provide to claimants, it is the responsibility of the DWP, in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus, to determine whether and how to implement our recommendations about effective practice in adviser techniques. Our comparison of the delivery of WFIs by public sector (Jobcentre Plus) and private sector (EZ) providers highlighted some key features of (effective) adviser techniques. The Department might consider whether our findings have implications for external delivery of employment services.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report presents findings of an in-depth, qualitative study of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) taking place in Jobcentre Plus offices and Employment Zones (EZs)¹. The research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and conducted between May 2007 and May 2009 by researchers in the Department of Sociology and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York.

The study utilised audio and video recordings of real Jobcentre Plus and EZ Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) between Personal Advisers (PAs) and claimants. Thus, the findings are based upon a precise record of what actually takes place during WFIs, rather than reconstructions, simulations or retrospective recollections. The study included analyses of WFIs with a range of Jobcentre Plus claimant groups and also a comparison of Jobcentre Plus and EZ WFIs for specific cohorts.

WFIs lie at the heart of providing claimants with information, advice and support about movement towards and into employment. The work of PAs during these WFIs forms the principal means for helping and encouraging people in their efforts to rejoin the labour market. Numerous studies of welfare-to-work programmes, including the New Deal for Disabled People, the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots and the Pathways to Work Pilots, have highlighted the importance of the interaction between PAs and claimants during WFIs (see, for example, Knight *et al.*, 2005; Lewis, *et al.*, 2005; Farrell *et al.*, 2006; Corden and Nice, 2006). The National Audit Office (2006: 13) reported that '*PAs have a positive impact on customers who want to work, by raising their confidence, equipping them with improved jobseeking skills and encouraging and assisting with job applications*'. Studies

¹ In certain areas of the country the New Deal for claimants over 25, for Lone Parents and also for New Deal for Young People returners, is contracted out to private sector companies in EZs. EZ providers typically have more flexibility in the programmes they can offer, and in the activities they engage in with claimants (such as working together on a claimant's CV).

consistently show that the adviser's ability to convey appropriate information at the appropriate time, within a relationship of cooperation, respect and trust, plays a crucial role in helping move claimants into work-related activity or work itself. While surveys suggest some variation between different claimant groups (NAO, 2006), reported levels of satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus advisory services are generally high. Moreover, quantitative research has consistently found that WFIs with PAs are associated with higher numbers leaving benefits (NAO, 2006). There is strong evidence, therefore, that advisers play a key role in the system and process of supporting people back into work and that the contribution of advisers is highly valued by claimants and DWP alike.

However, there remain significant gaps in knowledge about what actually 'makes the difference' in WFIs, what it is that advisers do in their interactions with claimants that encourages and assists people towards work. Drawing on a concept from social psychology and communications theory, the WFI might be described as a 'black box'. It is known that WFIs are perceived to be effective and that they generate considerable claimant satisfaction, but studies to date have lacked a detailed and direct focus on the interaction between advisers and claimants, on how advisers manage the style and content of meetings with claimants and how claimants respond.

Until now, most research on the advisory role has used **indirect** and **retrospective** means to assess advisers' effectiveness and claimant satisfaction. The methods usually employed to study the content, conduct and claimant experience of WFIs include semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and survey techniques. There has been some use of observational techniques in previous DWP research, such as site visits, shadowing advisers, and observing WFIs (for example, Brown and Joyce, 2007; McKenna *et al.*, 2005). Direct observation of advisory practice during WFIs also forms a part of supervisory and quality assurance processes within Jobcentre Plus. However, these evidence sources are limited, both in quantity and also in the degree to which a full and accurate record could be kept of what was said and done during the WFI. For the most part, the methods used to date rely almost entirely on recall – on people's memories and impressions of what happened, or what typically or generally happens, in WFIs. We know from general experience (as well as research evidence²) that such retrospective recollections can be incomplete, inaccurate or subject to revision or 'reframing' over time.

In sum, very little is known about **specifically and precisely** what happens during WFIs. The question of 'what works' during WFIs can only be comprehensively

² The limitations of methods that rely on recall were highlighted in a classic study by Waitzkin (1985). Waitzkin found that, when **interviewed** about their consultations, doctors estimated that they spent about nine minutes giving information to patients, comprising approximately 50 per cent of average consultation time. An analysis of the **recorded** consultations, however, revealed that in fact doctors had spent only 1.3 minutes in this activity – just nine per cent of the consultation.

answered through the examination of the fine details of interactions between advisers and claimants, the specificities of what one says and how the other responds, and precisely how the participants talk and interact with one another. It is these gaps in knowledge which the present study has sought to address, through the direct recording and analysis of a set of real Jobcentre Plus and EZ WFIs, as we explain further below.

The following sections of this introductory chapter describe:

- the study's aims and research questions;
- the data collection method and achieved sample;
- the methodological approach;
- the structure of the report.

1.2 Aims and research questions

With the combined awareness of the importance of the advisory role alongside the limited evidence base on advisory practice during WFIs, DWP wished to commission a study which explored the effectiveness of the PA role in a more direct and detailed manner than had been hitherto attempted. The method of Conversation Analysis (CA) (described in more detail in Section 1.3) was proposed as a means through which a more in-depth understanding could be obtained. The objective of the study was to identify those advisory techniques and styles, employed during WFIs with benefits claimants, which seemed to be effective in moving people closer to work³. It was intended that those effective techniques or interactional styles would then be shared and disseminated through their incorporation into future training programmes for advisers.

The principal aims of the study were to:

- contribute to the evidence base regarding what actually takes place in WFIs;
- identify those techniques and styles used by advisers during WFIs that seemed to be most effective in moving people closer to work;
- make recommendations concerning effective practice in WFIs, for three main claimant groups.

³ At all stages of the study, it was made clear in discussions between the DWP research commissioners, the research team, and the Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants who took part in the study, that the purpose of the research was not in any way to monitor or assess the performance of individual advisers. The approach to assessing effectiveness taken in this study (described further in Chapter 2) was not based upon any pre-existing effectiveness criteria on which advisers might be evaluated through supervision in the normal course of their work.

A number of more specific research questions were identified, including:

- How and when do PAs introduce the notion of **work** into WFIs?
- How do they attempt to engender in claimants a positive attitude towards moving into work?
- How do they attempt to encourage and support claimants?
- How is the conditionality of benefit, and the compulsory nature of WFIs (for some claimants) explained?
- To what extent do advisers use techniques of pressure (for example, by referring to conditionality and sanctions) in interviews?
- Does an 'agenda' on the part of claimants emerge in interviews, and if so how is it managed by the adviser? (For example, a claimant might not be interested in moving towards work, or might be interested in benefit or money advice.)
- How is the requirement to agree and complete an Action Plan introduced and negotiated by advisers?
- How are the other requirements of the 'must do'⁴ list managed?
- Are there points in interviews that act as either positive or negative 'triggers' – for example in moving reluctant claimants to thinking positively about work?

Section 1.3 describes the methodological approach through which the above research questions and objectives were addressed.

1.3 Methodological approach

In this section, we begin by describing the approach to data collection and sampling used in this study and go on to explain the methodological approach taken, including an overview of the method of CA.

1.3.1 Data collection and sampling approach

In order to provide an appropriate evidence base for what actually takes place in WFIs, the study utilised recordings of 'naturally occurring' interactions, i.e. those which took place in the course of an adviser's day-to-day work and which formed

⁴ In early project discussions, DWP colleagues referred to a 'must do' list comprising tasks or activities that must be covered during a WFI. Through subsequent enquiries and exploration of the literature, we came to understand that the components of this 'must do' list are somewhat different depending on WFI type, and that the notion of a 'list' is in some cases rather more conceptual than referring to a specific document. However, in informing our approach to the research question above, we have drawn upon the lists provided by Davis *et al.* (2007), Corkett *et al.* (2005) and the DWP Technical Factsheet T15 (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/esa/factsheets-esa.asp>).

part of a benefit claimant's standard schedule of attendance. The recordings were made between July 2007 and June 2008, in eight Jobcentre Plus offices and two EZs across four regions of England, selected in consultation with DWP colleagues. The data collection method and sample design is detailed below.

Fieldwork sites

The areas identified for data collection were chosen in order to be geographically and demographically diverse, and to meet the strategic aims of the project. This required selecting Jobcentre Plus offices that were involved in the Pathways to Work Pilots at the time of recording, so as to cover mandatory WFLs with Incapacity Benefit claimants, and to include at least one region that had both Jobcentre Plus and EZ provision. There was interest in including an EZ comparison, in view of findings from previous research which indicated that EZ provision was somewhat more successful in moving claimants into work (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007). In order to achieve the target number and type of EZ WFLs, two EZs were included in the final sample. Both were run by the same provider, one being located in a 'single' provider region and one in a 'multiple provider' region.⁵

Recruitment and consent

Initial contact with Jobcentre Plus and EZ staff was made in writing by the DWP project manager. Thereafter, the research team made initial site visits to introduce the aims and methods of the project to managers and advisers in each Jobcentre Plus and EZ office. Written information leaflets were provided to Jobcentre Plus and EZ staff for their further consideration. Contact was then made by a researcher a few days after the site visits to establish whether any members of advisory staff wished to volunteer to take part. Within each office, advisers were invited to participate **voluntarily** and on an **individual** basis. In total, 47 advisers (34 Jobcentre Plus, 13 EZ) volunteered to be recorded for the study. It is not really possible to estimate the percentage recruitment (or 'cooperation rate') among advisers; i.e. what was the total population from which these 47 advisers were drawn. The advisers who volunteered were generally those who had attended our initial presentations about the project; thus, they were 'self-selected' in a double sense – they had chosen to attend the presentation in their office, and then had volunteered to take part. Having self-selected, the advisers who volunteered for the study might be expected to be amongst the more confident advisers. But we are unable to draw any inferences about their representativeness, or the reasons their colleagues may have had for not attending our presentations and hence not volunteering.⁶

⁵ 'Single' and 'multiple' provider zones simply distinguishes those EZs in which only one private sector company was contracted to offer the service, from those in which more than one company was contracted.

⁶ Some advisers did volunteer who had not attended our presentation, when word got about the office and they thought they'd like to be involved.

Over a period of ten months, the research team spent one or more full or partial working days with each adviser. Shortly before each WFI, the study was explained to claimants verbally, either by a researcher or the adviser, depending on which was deemed most appropriate by the adviser. All individuals approached were also given an information leaflet to keep. Almost 80 per cent of claimants who were invited to take part agreed to do so. It was not possible to draw any conclusions about the reasons some claimants had for declining to participate; but there was nothing that struck us as indicating that they were in any way atypical. Signed consent was obtained from all participating advisers and claimants prior to making any recordings. These forms gave a written guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, reiterated the voluntary nature of participation, and allowed the adviser and claimant to indicate whether they agreed to a video recording being made, or wished to have only an audio recording made of their WFI. Eighty seven per cent of the recordings were made using video (hence in only 13 per cent of cases did either claimant or advisor agree to audio recording only). Advisers and claimants were also asked to indicate whether or not they agreed to clips from the video recordings being used in presentations. For 86 per cent of the video recordings made, permission was given for clips to be played: participants were guaranteed that recordings would only be shown as excerpts in which faces and other identifying audio and visual details had been obscured. The conditions attached to all these permissions – including anonymity, pixelating face and other identifying features, and showing/playing recordings only if permission was granted – have been strictly adhered to throughout.

Researchers operating the recording equipment did not ‘sit in’ on the interview or listen remotely to the recording, other than to make an initial sound check. However, researchers remained in the vicinity, in case advisers or claimants asked for the recording to be stopped at any time during the WFI, and for the recording to be deleted (they were explicitly given this option before recording began; in no cases did participants ask for the recording to be stopped or for the recording to be erased).

Sampling approach

It was agreed with DWP colleagues that the study would include a focus on a range of benefit types and WFI contexts. These were selected to reflect areas of key policy interest at the time the research was commissioned, and included WFIs with:

- lone parents claiming Income Support (IS);
- people claiming a benefit related to ill health or disability; and
- people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) while unemployed.

The frequency, content and structure of WFIs, as well as whether claimants attend on a mandatory or voluntary basis, each vary according to different benefit types and programmes. To provide insights into different types of Jobcentre Plus

programmes and enable comparison with EZ provision, a range of different WFI types was recorded for the three claimant cohorts listed above. These included:

- New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) for new claimants of JSA;
- mandatory WFIs within the JSA New Deal 25+ (ND25+) programme and their EZ equivalent (initial and subsequent WFIs);
- mandatory initial and review WFIs for lone arents claiming IS;
- voluntary WFIs within the New Deal for lone parents and their EZ equivalent (initial and subsequent WFIs); and
- mandatory initial WFIs for claimants on Incapacity Benefit.

Target sample sizes for each of these groups were agreed in advance with DWP colleagues. A detailed breakdown of target and achieved WFI recordings⁷ is shown in Table 1.1.

A total of 243 recordings were made during the data collection period. Of these, 188 were included in the analysis presented in the present report⁸, as summarised in Table 1.1. The corpus of data collected for this study thus provides a unique and

⁷ Despite taking all feasible steps to achieve target samples, such as the addition of a second EZ and returning to particular Jobcentre Plus offices on multiple occasions to increase numbers of WFIs of particular types, in some cases, it was not possible to achieve specific targets during the data collection period. However, the total number of recordings exceeded initial expectations and we were able to include a focus on review meetings for lone parents, additional to the study's original remit.

⁸ In order to familiarise themselves and Jobcentre Plus staff with the data collection process in the early stages of fieldwork, researchers made recordings of all WFIs conducted by a particular adviser during the course of their working day (where claimants were amenable). This resulted in a certain amount of data which did not meet the target criteria for the present analysis and are therefore not considered further in this report. The recordings that did not meet the target criteria include WFIs with New Deal 18-24 and New Deal 50+ claimants; review WFIs with those claiming incapacity benefits; Rapid Reclaim interviews with JSA claimants; Fail To Attend (FTA) and More Frequent Attendance (MFA) interviews with claimants who had not been meeting the conditions for claiming JSA; and a Partner Interview.

unprecedented level of direct insight into the content and conduct of Jobcentre Plus and EZ WFIs.⁹

Table 1.1 Target and achieved sample sizes for WFI types

| | Target | Achieved |
|---|------------|------------|
| Jobseeker's Allowance | 90 | 83 |
| NJIs | | |
| • Claimants aged 18-24 | 20 | 20 |
| • Claimants aged 25+ | 20 | 22 |
| New Deal 25+: initial WFIs | 10 | 4 |
| New Deal 25+: subsequent WFIs | 20 | 17 |
| Employment Zone for JSA 25+: initial WFIs | 10 | 7 |
| Employment Zone for JSA 25+: subsequent WFIs | 10 | 13 |
| IS for Lone Parents | 70 | 85 |
| Initial WFIs | 20 | 17 |
| Review WFIs | n/a | 21 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents: initial WFIs | 10 | 12 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents: subsequent WFIs | 20 | 15 |
| Employment Zone for Lone Parents: initial WFIs | 10 | 9 |
| Employment Zone for Lone Parents: subsequent WFIs | 10 | 11 |
| Incapacity Benefit | 20 | 20 |
| Initial Pathways to Work WFIs | 20 | 20 |
| Total | 180 | 188 |

Later chapters of this report (Chapters 3-6) focus on specific sections of the data and each of these chapters includes a summary of the relevant subset of recordings and more specific information about these WFIs.

⁹ Only one other DWP study to date has been based on video recordings. Roberts and Campbell (2006) (see also Roberts et al., 2008) recorded 61 authentic job interviews (and where possible post-interview decision making) from which they focused on a core of 29 recordings. Although their methodology was similar to that used in our study, Roberts *et al.*, were focusing on job interviews, not Jobcentre Plus WFIs. For a further report arising from our study, see Irvine *et al.*, 2010. Based on recordings collected for this project and using the same CA methodology, the additional report focuses specifically on WFIs with claimants aged 50 and over.

'Post-interviews'

A final element of the data collection process was the 'post-interview'. Where time allowed, researchers held brief conversations with advisers after each WFI, to gather factual details about the WFI type, basic claimant demographics (age, gender, ethnicity) and claim history (prior claims, length of current claim) and to obtain a brief commentary from the adviser on how they felt that the interview had gone and any further information that the adviser felt was pertinent. These brief conversations with advisers were not intended to provide substantive data, but provided valuable context and clarification, which has informed our analysis and broader understanding.

1.3.2 Analytic approach

The methodology through which we have analysed these recordings, with a view to answering the research questions addressed by this project, is known as CA. Because this methodology is new to DWP research, we will describe its essential features in this section.

A brief introduction to Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis is a qualitative, micro-analytic, systematic comparative and inductive methodology for studying real-life interactions. We use audio and video recordings of authentic interactions to enable us to make direct observations and detailed analyses of what actually takes place. Although CA originated through the study of everyday interaction, in recent years the methodology of CA has been applied to a range of more formal or institutional settings, including medical interactions (Heritage and Stivers, 1999; Mangione-Smith et al., 2003; Heritage and Maynard, 2006; Collins et al., 2005), psychotherapy (Peräkylä et al. 2008) and police call handling (Drew, 1998).

In everyday interaction we accomplish a wide range of 'social actions' through our spoken communications with others. We make offers, we agree or disagree with one another, we make suggestions or invitations. In WFI interactions, PAs are, similarly, engaged in a range of context-specific actions and activities with their claimants, e.g. establishing intentions and aspirations for work, encouraging claimants to take up various forms of support, gathering and delivering information, and ensuring that people understand the conditions of their benefit receipt. It is the accomplishment of such tasks and activities taking place within the WFI, specifically how they are done and how certain approaches appear to influence the ensuing interaction, that form the focus for a CA study of institutional interaction.

It is important to understand that CA is not an interpretative method. The aim is not to uncover people's hidden meaning, to interpret their underlying goals, or to decipher covert messages. The method of CA focuses only on participants' objectively observable, empirical conduct, based on detailed analysis of actual interactions. It offers advantages, therefore, in expanding our knowledge and

understanding about WFIs by providing more accurate information about what actually takes place, on which to base recommendations for practice.

In brief, the key advantages of a CA approach are that it:

- does not rely on advisers' or claimants' recall, which can often be incomplete or inaccurate;
- is less susceptible to filtering or 'socially desirable' reframing according to what people think they should say; and
- investigates directly how people actually behave and talk, in a level of detail that the speakers are unlikely to be consciously aware of and could not possibly recall.

Using Conversation Analysis to study interactions in WFIs: key analytic stages

The analytic work follows four key stages, as follows: First, as a preliminary stage, recordings are transcribed in considerable detail, to show not only **what** was said but **how** it was said, using symbols to represent features of both the timing of speech and the manner of speaking. For example, transcriptions show overlapping speech between speakers, pauses (timed to tenths of a second), aspects of intonation and prosody (loudness, speaking emphatically, quiet speech), and the way in which speakers often stretch sounds or 'drag out' words. (A glossary of the transcription symbols used in this report is included as Appendix A.) In the present study, the majority of the recordings were transcribed in full (153 of the 188 recorded WFIs), with shorter selected sections of the remaining recordings transcribed according to developing lines of enquiry.

Second, conversation analysis proceeds by assembling 'collections' of **all instances** of particular interactional activities, e.g. advisers asking about job goals or childcare arrangements, or giving information about training opportunities, etc. Analysis is systematic (not selective), incorporating all cases rather than focusing on exceptional ones. In the present study we examined **all** recordings for each WFI type in turn, in order to identify the key activities evident in each. We were also guided by the research questions agreed with DWP (see Section 1.2) and by ongoing discussions with DWP and Jobcentre Plus stakeholders¹⁰. We thus ensured we addressed key areas of policy interest as reflected in the sample design (see Section 1.3.1).

¹⁰ In order to share emerging findings at the earliest opportunity, and to ensure that the study was pursuing lines of enquiry of greatest relevance to DWP and Jobcentre Plus, presentations and workshops were held with key stakeholders at various points during the study period. Meetings were held in May 2008 for those with a remit around Incapacity Benefit; May and August 2008 for lone parent stakeholders; and January 2008 and January 2009 for those with a remit around Jobseeker's Allowance.

The third stage is to examine each collection in detail, the aim being to identify similarities or differences in how a particular activity is accomplished (e.g. differences in words, phrases or techniques used by advisers). This is crucial because we know from previous CA research that even a difference of a single word can be consequential for the interaction¹¹.

The fourth stage, then, is to assess the impact or 'interactional consequences' of an adviser employing one approach or another. In addition to comparing all instances of one approach with all instances of another, we also tried – insofar as the data permitted – to compare similar cases (e.g. extracts from WFIs with lone parents in broadly similar circumstances) where different approaches were used, with different interactional outcomes. The aim is to see how the interaction progresses; e.g. in cooperative, collaborative ways or whether it runs into difficulties of confusion, misunderstanding or misalignment. In this way, we sought to identify whether different interactional strategies might be considered more effective in achieving positive progress during a given WFI.

Finally, as our analysis progressed, a number of cross-cutting themes began to emerge across the specific WFIs with the different claimant groups. In later stages of this study, therefore, a more thematic lens was also applied to the data (see Chapter 7).

Throughout this study we reported our emerging findings to groups of stakeholders, which included DWP policy makers, DWP staff in sections with a remit covering specific claimant groups (e.g. incapacity benefits claimants, lone parents), Jobcentre Plus staff, and sometimes advisers. Our presentations to such stakeholder groups always involved a substantial workshop element, including playing back to them portions of the video recorded WFIs (suitably anonymised), allowing full discussion of our observations and findings. In general, stakeholders agreed that what we were finding rang true in their experience; and that we were drawing valid conclusions from the evidence of the recorded WFIs.

¹¹ A particularly striking illustration comes from a CA study of medical interaction (an area of applied research in which CA's methodology has proved remarkably fruitful and successful). A study of primary care acute visits to an outpatient clinic in the US (Heritage *et al.*, 2007) examined cases in which, according to a pre-visit survey, patients had multiple concerns. The analysis showed that if doctors solicited additional concerns by asking, after patients had presented their principal concern, '*Is there anything else you want to address in the visit today?*', patients generally did not raise their other, as yet unmet, concerns. However in the majority of cases in which doctors instead asked '*Is there **something** else you want to address in the visit today?*', patients did raise their unmet concerns. Therefore, the slight difference in wording made a significant difference to whether or not patients' unmet medical concerns came to be discussed in the consultation.

The use of video recordings

Video records gave us access not only to participants' verbal conduct during WFIs, but also to their non-verbal behaviour, which was useful in a number of respects. Although we focused primarily on what advisers and claimants **said** to one another, because it is primarily through speech that the business of WFIs is conducted, the record of what could be seen as well as heard during these interactions was valuable, in the following respects.

There were numerous **silences** during the WFI recordings. The video showed whether, during these silences, advisers and claimants were looking at the monitor together, were both looking at a document, or whether the adviser was using the computer. Sometimes advisers also left their workstations to collect print-outs or other materials.

There were also **occasions when advisers referred to information on the computer screens**, for instance when adding to the Jobseeker's Agreement or conducting a job search. Only a video record could show whether or not advisers shared the screen with claimants at this point and the degree to which claimants engaged with what was on the screen. This enabled us to gauge both the extent to which advisers involved claimants in the information on the screen, and how involved claimants were in what was being said about that information. Having visual access to advisers' and claimants' mutual orientation to the screen and how on-screen content featured in their interaction (for example, what was physically pointed out by each party) was a particular benefit of the video record. When looking at the screen together, claimants sometimes highlighted or corrected information they saw on the screen. Video records showed where this was accompanied by pointing at a place on the screen; whether or not that was accompanied by a verbalisation, the act of pointing as a means of correction was itself an important resource for claimants.

In some cases, **claimants showed advisers documents**, which they scrutinised together. There were sometimes verbal references to particular documents (i.e. **this** and **that**, etc.), which it would not have been possible to decipher without the video record. Additionally, in some WFIs, claimants were asked to sign documents; the manner in which this was approached sometimes reflected how 'smoothly' or otherwise the interview had gone up to that point. Generally, the video record showed much about how advisers and claimants consulted, scrutinised and puzzled over documents together.

Participants sometimes **responded non-verbally**, for instance by nodding, or a shake of the head, or by smiling or yawning. Perhaps most significantly, claimants' engagement with what was being said by an adviser was very much reflected in their **physical demeanour**, for example, how a claimant sat, whether they looked at the adviser, and by their facial expression. Sometimes, reluctance on the part of a claimant was manifest as much in their expression and bodily deportment as by what was said. Similarly, enthusiastic engagement was also visibly manifest.

In all these and other respects the video record supported our understanding of the patterns of speech in the interactions between advisers and claimants. Without access to participants' non-verbal conduct, it would sometimes have been difficult to know precisely what was going on or precisely what they were talking about; and we would have missed significant indications of claimants' engagement in the WFIs, as well as, sometimes, their detachment from them. The verbal and visual records worked together to provide a comprehensive picture of the interactions between claimants and advisers.

We acknowledge, though, that we cannot be entirely sure whether claimants or advisers adjusted or changed their behaviour, in the knowledge that they were being recorded. The evidence from our previous experience and that of other researchers is that recording generally does not affect people's behaviour, certainly after the opening moments in which participants tend to refer to and joke about the presence of the camera (e.g. *'You're a film star'*), after which participants tend to forget completely that they are being recorded. Video recording is widely used in studying medical interactions, often of a highly sensitive nature (for instance one of the team has recorded consultants examining patients in an ENT oncology clinic), without any apparent impact on the validity of the data. Of course it is worth taking into account the possibility that advisers might have been 'doing their best' and claimants might have been particularly co-operative – and thus that our findings might be 'biased' in a 'conservative' direction, flattening out the difficulties that might otherwise have been more prominent. But this is supposition; it would be safer to regard video recording as a non-intrusive method.

Box 1.1 provides a summary of the key features of this study's methodology.

Box 1.1 Key features of the study

- Providing an **accurate and comprehensive evidence base** of what actually occurs during a WFI through the use of **audio and video recordings of real WFIs** taking place in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices.
- Using the method of **CA** to conduct a detailed analysis of interactions between advisers and claimants in WFIs – of **what** is said and done and precisely **how** things are said and done.
- Identifying the advisory **techniques, practices or strategies that appear to be effective** in encouraging claimants to take steps towards work-related activities or work itself.
- Including a range of WFI types with claimants of different benefits, to provide a focus both on **cross-cutting themes** and **distinctive features** of WFIs with different claimant groups.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 Identifying 'effectiveness' in Work Focused Interviews.
- Chapter 3 New Jobseeker Interviews with JSA 18-24 and 25+ claimants.
- Chapter 4 Initial Work Focused interviews with incapacity benefits claimants in Pathways to Work areas.
- Chapter 5 Mandatory initial and review Work Focused Interviews with lone parents claiming Income Support.
- Chapter 6 A comparison between Work Focused Interviews in Jobcentre Plus and Employment Zone offices.
- Chapter 7 Process-led and claimant-focused approaches to tasks in the Work Focused Interview.
- Chapter 8 Conclusions.

Throughout the report, findings are illustrated with reference to extracts from the transcribed WFI recordings. As has been explained above, the method of CA is grounded in consideration of **all instances** of a given action or activity. In the chapters that follow, examples chosen to illustrate overall findings were not selected because they were special or sensational, but because they clearly illustrated a more widespread pattern to be found in the data. However, it should also be noted that in certain cases we show an extract that in some respects stands out from other cases, in order to illustrate a specific observation about interactional effectiveness in that particular WFI.

2 Identifying 'effectiveness' in Work Focused Interviews

2.1 Internal indicators, not outcome measure

As explained in the previous chapter, the central objective of this study was to identify those advisory techniques and styles, employed by advisers **during Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)**, that seemed to be most effective. The research questions and methodology of this study required a different approach to identifying effectiveness than the measures and criteria that have typically been applied previously. In this chapter, therefore, we explain the way in which the present study has conceptualised adviser 'effectiveness' during WFIs, and we outline the approach we took in identifying indicators of the relative effectiveness of adviser techniques.

Quantitative outcome measures are widely used in research evaluating the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus interventions. For example, figures relating to job entries, periods of sustained employment, exits from benefits, and take-up rates for various programmes are often used to assess how far Jobcentre Plus is meeting its service delivery and labour market objectives. Hasluck and Green (2007) provide a summary and synthesis of the results of various programmes evaluated according to such criteria (see also Bewley *et al.*, 2007).

For the present study, such outcome measures were neither available (given that only a one-off WFI recording was made with each claimant), nor would they have been appropriate to the research questions being addressed. Outcome measures such as job entry or programme take-up gauge the effectiveness of advisory practice only indirectly. A basic measure of, for example, job entry, allows only an indirect inference about the role and significance of the WFI regime and does not illuminate **specifically what** was effective about, or in, the adviser-claimant interaction.

Moreover, although WFIs are at the heart of Jobcentre Plus service provision, claimant outcomes are contingent on multiple factors. The extent to which a positive overall outcome on benefit exit or job entry is directly or necessarily related to the WFI regime cannot be assumed. This again suggests that outcome measures alone are not a sufficient means of assessing the effectiveness of adviser **conduct** in WFIs. Our focus, therefore, was on indicators of effectiveness within the interactions themselves.

2.2 The 'how' of adviser practice, not the 'what'

For each type of WFI, there is a set of tasks (sometimes referred to as the 'must do' list¹²) that the adviser is required to complete, or should aim to complete in a certain target percentage of cases. These include, for example, conducting a better off calculation, completing a Jobseeker's Agreement, conducting an assisted job search, referring (or 'submitting') the claimant to relevant job vacancies, making referrals to external providers and establishing an action plan (all depending of course on the claimant category and type of WFI). One approach to measuring effectiveness **within** WFIs, therefore, might be to monitor whether each of these tasks is completed, in the manner of a 'checklist'.

However, it is apparent that the latest thinking within Jobcentre Plus is that it is important to consider not so much **whether or not** a task was completed, but rather **how** a given activity was conducted. Recognising the importance of this distinction, James and Booth (2008) state that: *'Trainers quickly found that it was not enough to describe to people WHAT they had to do in a task, it was often crucially important to describe HOW to perform the task if required outcomes were to be achieved'*. In other words, the effectiveness with which a task is performed cannot be evaluated simply by recording whether or not that task was performed.

Our focus, therefore, is not simply on whether or not a task was accomplished, but on the **quality and nature of the interaction** through which each of the tasks was performed.¹³ As we discussed in Chapter 1, the use of video recordings has enabled us to examine closely **precisely how** various tasks are performed within the WFI; and to examine whether there were differences in the effectiveness of the

¹² See, for example, Corkett *et al.* (2005); McKenna *et al.* (2005).

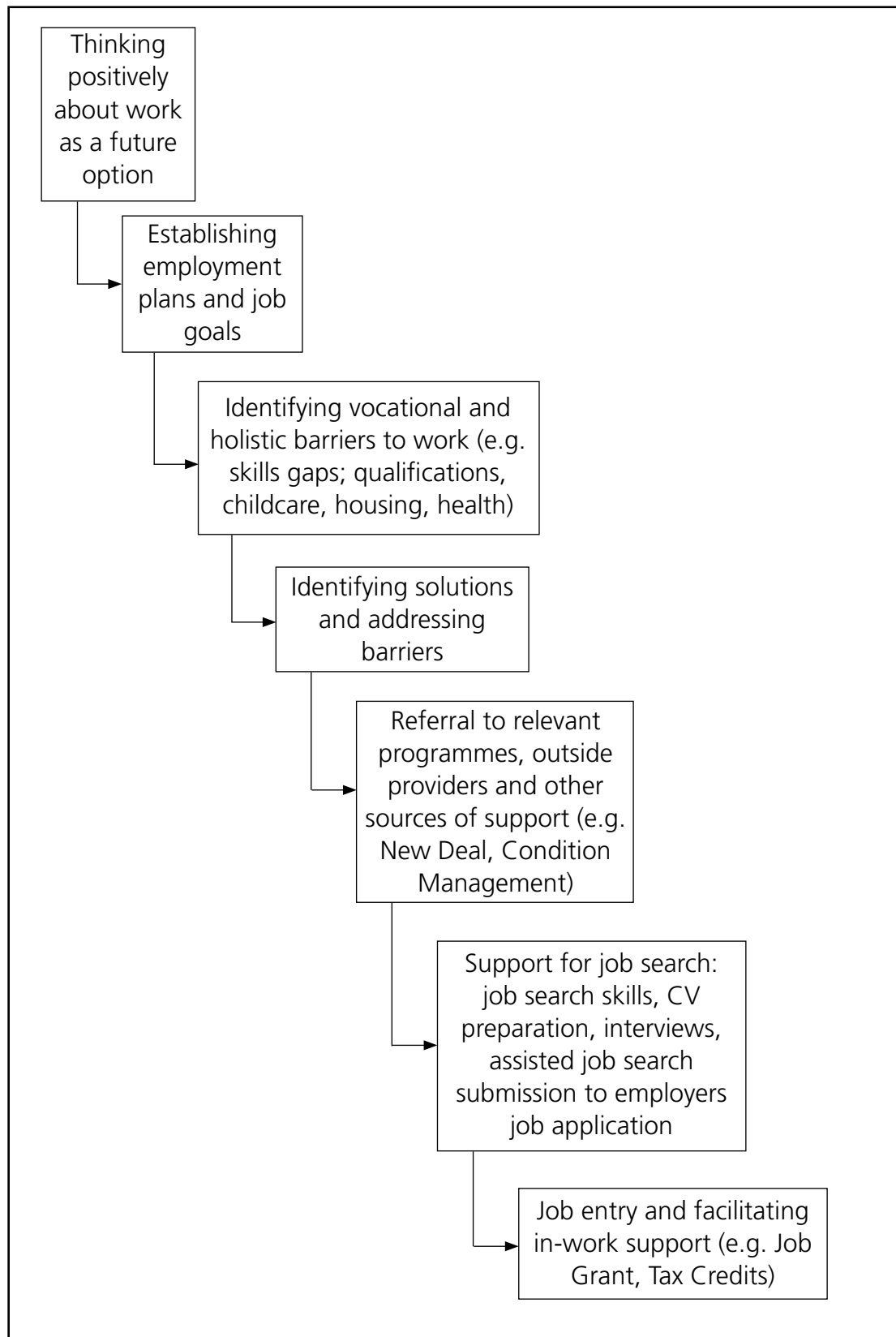
¹³ This is supported by James and Booth's summary of an observational study of JSA interviews, which showed that *'...most advisers did not ask questions of jobseekers when developing their Jobseeker's Agreement, relying instead on "telling" jobseekers what to do. Where questions and explorations were used, jobseekers were more likely to report using their Jobseeker's Agreement as an aid to job search and more likely to report feeling the resultant Jobseeker's Agreement was useful.'* From this, they conclude that *'...How the advisers went about performing the task, the verbal style they used to produce a Jobseeker's Agreement, had a marked effect on the outcomes achieved'* (James and Booth, 2008: 7).

various approaches or communicative techniques that advisers used to perform the necessary tasks during WFIs.

2.3 Meeting the overall aim of the WFI

To conceptualise the **internal markers or indicators of effectiveness** observable in a detailed analysis of WFI recordings, it is useful to start with the question: what are advisers trying to achieve in these interactions?¹⁴ The broad answer is that they are seeking to help claimants move closer to the labour market and, where possible, back into work. For this to happen, there are a number of stages that a claimant might need to move through – assisted by their meetings with an adviser. A simplified model of this process is shown in Figure 2.1. We recognise that the process may not be linear, as shown here, but may involve movements back and forth and simultaneous activity within different elements; in addition, claimants may be at different distances from the labour market, and WFIs for different claimant groups may have somewhat different components. Nevertheless, Figure 2.1 illustrates the common purpose shared by advisers when meeting with claimants: to assist them in exploring and identifying appropriate employment options, potential barriers, and relevant activities which might progress their journey towards work. To this end, the PA role involves a combination of motivation, advice, guidance, information provision and (where appropriate) job search support, as well as a 'diagnostic' element of identifying barriers or skills gaps and making referrals to appropriate support.

¹⁴ For a discussion of how the goals of an institution inform conversation analytic work on institutional interaction, see Heritage (1997).

Figure 2.1 Adviser-supported stages on the journey towards work

Each of these stages represents a step towards the eventual goal of (re)entering employment. While, as has already been noted, the present study does not have information on whether or not claimants obtained this goal following their WFI, what we can observe and assess is **which adviser strategies**, used during a given WFI, are more (or less) successful in assisting a claimant to consider constructively, or make positive progress within, one or more of these stages. This is what we take to be effective practice in the context of the present analysis.

In the next two sections we describe the indicators we used to identify those strategies that were more effective in moving claimants closer to the labour market.

2.4 Claimants' responses as indicators of the effectiveness of advisers' techniques

Progress both within and between each of the stages shown in Figure 2.1 is reliant, to a very considerable extent, on claimants' responses to information, suggestions, questions, advice and so forth. For instance, when a lone parent claimant responds positively to an adviser's enquiry about willingness to consider childcare, to enable them to take part-time work at least, that response opens up a progression during the WFI; the adviser now has an opportunity to give tailored information about childcare provision in the area, and perhaps put the claimant in touch with a provider. If on the other hand a claimant responds negatively to such an enquiry, that progression is blocked – temporarily, perhaps, but most likely for the remainder of that WFI, and perhaps for the foreseeable future. Similarly, if a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimant responds positively to an adviser's suggestion that second and third job goals may contribute as steps towards their main job goal, they are more likely to progress towards agreeing job goals that are both realistic and suited to their aptitudes and experience. And an IB claimant is more likely to progress towards being put in touch with a training provider if they have responded positively to the adviser's enquiries about whether suitable training might help overcome one of their present barriers to work.

Generally speaking, positive responses on the part of claimants indicate interest in and possible agreement to work-related steps, whilst negative responses impede progress towards work-related activities. Claimants' responses serve, therefore, as a measure of the effectiveness of specific communicative practices or techniques **for moving claimants forward**; if a given technique (e.g. form of wording) tends to result in positive responses, and hence from there progresses the claimant along the steps outlined in Figure 2.1, that technique is more effective than a different technique (or form of words) for managing the same activity, but to which claimants respond negatively.

We can make a basic distinction, therefore, between positive or **conductive** responses which progress the WFI towards work-related activities and outcomes; and negative or **resistive** responses, that delay or block such progress during the WFI.

Figure 2.2 Claimants’ responses during WFIs

| Conducive (positive) responses | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Acceptance and agreement | <i>Yeah I'd be interested in that definitely</i> (re. being referred to a Condition Management Programme) |
| Engagement and enthusiasm | <i>Oh right it sounds good that's excellent</i> |
| Alignment | <i>I've rung up companies asking if they've got apprenticeships and that</i> (re. adviser's asking about job search activity) |
| Resistive (negative) responses | |
| Non-committal | <i>Silence, mmhm</i> |
| Confused (non- or mis-understanding) | <i>So what do I have to do now</i> (at end of interview, as adviser is about to close) |
| Disconfirming and declining | <i>No I'm not really interested in temporary work</i> (when the adviser has suggested ticking temporary work) |
| Resisting | <i>That would have been lovely</i> (in response to adviser's encouraging claimant to follow up application which has not been acknowledged; claimant thereby evades committing) |

Claimant responses, as indicators of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the adviser's approach in facilitating work-focused discussion and progressing the back-to-work journey, can be summarised as follows:

- commitment versus resistance;
- comprehension versus. misunderstanding;
- engagement/enthusiasm versus passivity;
- increased confidence versus no change.

It is important to acknowledge that a claimant’s display of enthusiasm or verbal commitment to action does not guarantee that they will pursue given steps towards work following that WFI encounter. However, within the context of the WFI, positive responses open up or encourage movement towards job readiness or work-related activities; whilst negative responses inhibit or even close down further discussion of claimants’ work readiness. Therefore positive claimant contributions are indicators of a more effective interaction; a conversation which opens up consideration of work-focused commitments is more effective than one in which the claimant remains passive or (at worst) silent.

2.5 The significance of claimants' responses for progression, during the WFI, along the journey to work

The significance of claimants' conducive or positive responses is that they reflect advisers' communicative efficacy in progressing claimants towards work-related activities, during the WFI itself. So that positive responses of the kind outlined in the previous section are strongly associated with – indeed preconditions for – incremental moves during the WFI towards the next stage in the journey towards work represented in Figure 2.1.

We found that the signs of incremental progressions towards work – in a sense nudging claimants during the WFI towards work or work-related activities – which are associated with and can follow from conducive, positive responses by claimants, are as follows:

- **Recruitments:** Adviser approaches which lead – **during the WFI itself** – to a claimant being referred or signed up to a particular programme; for example, lone parents agreeing to join an adviser's New Deal caseload or incapacity benefits claimants opting to participate in the Condition Management Programme.
- **Direct action:** Where the adviser facilitates or implements an aspect of support during the WFI itself; for example, setting up an appointment to visit a childcare provider.
- **Turnarounds:** Where there is a clearly observable change in a claimant's attitude or outlook during the WFI; for example, from not considering work as a future possibility to engaging in work-focused discussion, or from initially dismissing a given job vacancy to considering it as an attractive option.

Turnarounds provide particularly vivid evidence of the efficacy of adviser techniques; although less frequent than recruitments and instances of 'direct actions' being taken during the WFI, they provide clear confirmation that positive responses are associated with progression towards work. For instance, after initially being non-committal or relatively negative, claimants may become more positive as the interview progresses, until they enthusiastically endorse certain job goals, job-related activities, referrals to service providers and the like. Such changes in claimants' responses – representing a kind of 'turnaround' in their interest in and willingness to take steps towards work – are clear indicators of the effectiveness of advisers' practices and techniques during the WFI.

Evidence gained from comparing one technique, practice or form of words with another was especially powerful when we were able to compare advisory practice with claimants whose circumstances were broadly similar (for example, lone parents with a child of a similar age), but for whom there are different (internal) outcomes of the WFI; for example, recruitment to programmes. In such cases, we could examine what 'made the difference' in motivating or encouraging the claimant

to the extent that they were recruited into receiving an enhanced programme of support. This is of particular interest where the ostensibly less 'job ready' claimant made more significant progress towards work.

Successful recruitments, turnarounds and direct action may also reflect success at a key aim discussed by James and Booth (2008): to develop a claimant's sense of self-efficacy during the WFI (James and Booth, 2008). Findings reported in later chapters include cases in which, at an early point in the WFI, claimants' responses indicated a low estimation of their chances of finding work, or relatively low aspirations (in terms of their qualifications, skills and aptitudes) for the kind of work they might seek. As the interviews progressed, their responses reflected a growing confidence in their ability to apply for and secure work; or an emerging confidence in their realistically applying for positions which were more commensurate with their qualifications and skills, and which better represented their aspirations, than the kind of jobs they had been thinking of initially.

2.6 Conclusion

The stages during the WFI on the journey towards work provide measures of the effectiveness of the WFI, and of advisers' techniques during the WFI. The incremental progression from one stage to the next are the measurable outcomes of what is achieved, what aims are realised during the WFI itself; claimants' responses serve as indicators of whether or not they have been persuaded or assisted to adopt a course of action or more positive perspective. The success or effectiveness of adviser practice can be judged in terms of whether, during the WFI, the claimant has agreed to or collaborated in taking steps that bring them closer to work, or has demonstrated a positive change or development in their thinking about their back-to-work journey. The magnitude of such changes and nature of appropriate 'stepping stones' towards work may, of course, vary according to each claimant's personal circumstances and current distance from the labour market. Nonetheless, successful techniques stand in contrast to those to which claimants respond negatively, thereby closing down consideration of work-related activities and opportunities – sometimes even in cases where the claimant was evidently work-ready.

3 New Jobseeker Interviews with JSA 18-24 and 25+ claimants

3.1 Background to Jobseeker's Allowance and the New Jobseeker Interview

With the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in October 1996 came a shift in emphasis within the benefits system. The full range of changes has been described in detail elsewhere (Bottomley *et al.*, 1997). Crucially, the requirement for claimants actively to be seeking and available for work became more explicit (McKay *et al.*, 1999: 7). Measures such as the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg), fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews, and an improved vacancy information system were introduced to encourage more effective job searching. At the same time, the system for ensuring that claimants met the conditions of JSA was tightened up (*ibid.*).

The recent Welfare Reform Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility* (DWP, 2008a), and subsequent White Paper, *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* (DWP, 2008b), further develop the twin emphasis on improving services for jobseekers and placing more rigorous eligibility conditions on JSA. As a recent DWP research and discussion paper explains:

'A more personalised conditionality regime is emerging, matched by more personalised support to help people into work. This aims to create expectations, and potential sanctions, which are appropriate yet challenging for individuals – while being underpinned by basic rules to ensure fairness.'

(DWP, 2008b: 1)

A central feature of this 'personalised regime' is the system of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) with a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser (PA). After calling the First

Contact Centre, whose staff record information about the claimant's work history, what kind of work they are looking for, and any restrictions on their availability, those wishing to make a claim to JSA are given an appointment for a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI). These take place at the claimant's local Jobcentre Plus office and are scheduled to last up to 40 minutes (Davis *et al.*, 2007). Immediately before the NJI, claimants must also attend a 20 minute interview with a financial adviser who (usually) establishes the claimant's eligibility for JSA and completes the relevant benefit and tax credit paperwork.

A central requirement for claiming JSA is the completion of the JSAg drawn up by an adviser on the basis of discussion with the claimant. The JSAg specifies the claimant's job goal(s) and the steps they have agreed to take each week in order to find work. Performing these activities is a condition of continued benefit receipt. Advisers are expected to ensure that the job goals are realistic in the local labour market, and that the claimant knows how to search for jobs and commits to doing so regularly. The adviser's role in the NJI, then, encompasses the Government's dual focus on conditionality and individualised support: the adviser must both impart the rules and regulations of JSA, and support the claimant in undertaking job search activities.

In this chapter we focus on the following key tasks performed by advisers during most of the NJIs in our dataset:

- establishing claimants' job goals (Section 3.3);
- establishing the steps claimants will take to find work (Section 3.4);
- conducting a job search with claimants (Section 3.5);
- explaining the conditions of JSA (Section 3.6).

3.2 Overview of the NJI subsample

In this chapter we examine recordings of 42 NJIs, conducted by ten advisers. These include 20 recordings with JSA 18-24 claimants and 22 with JSA 25+ claimants. Table 3.1 shows a breakdown of the characteristics of this subsample. As the final row shows, almost half of these claimants had made a claim to benefit previously. Most of these were to JSA, with the exception of the following: one 18-24 claimant had been claiming Hardship Allowance as a 16-18 year old; one 25+ claimant was transferring from Income Support (IS) because her oldest child had just turned 16; and one 25+ claimant had been, and was continuing to, claim Carers' Allowance in addition to JSA. However, all the recordings are of full NJIs (i.e. this is the first interview for a new claim to JSA). Rapid Reclaim interviews were excluded from this dataset, and subsequent New Deal interviews are the subject of Chapter 6. Table 3.2 shows some significant variation in the length of the NJIs. However, this variation is not related to whether claimants fall within the 18-24 or 25+ categories.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the NJI subsample

| Characteristic | JSA 18-24 | JSA 25+ | Total |
|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| | Number of claimants | Number of claimants | |
| Gender | | | |
| Female | 7 | 4 | 11 |
| Male | 13 | 18 | 31 |
| Age | | | |
| Teens | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| 20s | 10 | 6 | 16 |
| 30s | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 40s | 0 | 9 | 9 |
| 50s | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Ethnicity | | | |
| White British | 20 | 22 | 42 |
| Previous claims | | | |
| Yes | 7 | 12 | 19 |
| No | 13 | 10 | 23 |

Table 3.2 Length of NJIs¹⁵

| Claimant group | 0-15 minutes | 16-30 minutes | 31-45 minutes | >45 minutes | Range |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| JSA 18-24 | 2 | 12 | 5 | 1 | 13 – 50 |
| JSA 25+ | 2 | 12 | 8 | 0 | 9 – 41 |

¹⁵ Table 3.2 shows some significant variation in the length of the NJIs. This variation is not related to whether claimants fall within the 18-24 or 25+ categories. Some of the variation does, however, seem to be related to whether the claimant had made a claim to JSA previously; but this is not consistently the case (e.g. although three of the four shortest WFIs were with repeat claimants, one was with a claimant claiming for the first time).

3.3 Establishing claimants' job goals

Key points

- Advisers' enquiries about job goals range from those in which the adviser suggests a possible job, through to questions which are open about what the claimant might choose.
- Advisers sometimes 'direct' claimants to include job goals that are not well matched to their qualifications, aptitudes and aspirations.
- There is sometimes a lack of fit between 'background information' about whether claimants wish to work full- or part-time, or are willing to work shifts and nights, and the type of work they are seeking.
- By not asking claimants more fully about their career goals, and exploring with them what steps they may have taken towards these, advisers may miscalculate whether or not job goals are 'realistic'.
- When asking claimants to consider 'realistic' job goals, advisers may represent secondary goals in such a way as to encourage claimants to select goals which relate to, and are steps towards, their main goal (effective practice).

3.3.1 Ways of asking about job goals

One of the principal elements of the JSAg is the list of (up to) three types of work for which claimants agree to search – their job goals. Advisers ask claimants about their job goals in a variety of ways, which fall broadly into three formats – the first of which is more process-driven, the latter two more claimant-focused:

- a format driven by completing the boxes in the JSAg;
- a more open, 'claimant-focused' form of enquiry;
- a claimant-focused (though less open) enquiry in which the PA suggests a field of work based on information already obtained.

The first format is 'process-led' insofar as the adviser uses a form of words based on what appears on the JSAg. For example, in Extract 3.1, the adviser reads off the screen: *type of work that you're looking for* (line 6). By contrast, in other cases advisers manage the same activity in a style that is more open, as in Extract 3.2: *what is your main job goal...what would you like to do* (lines 1-3).

Extract 3.1 [026] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07)

1 PA: (Yeah) now the next thing we need to do is what we call (is)
 2 a Jobseeker's agreement now this is basically where you're
 3 saying the type of work you're looking for: how you're gonna
 4 be looking for it any restrictions that you feel (that)
 5 needs to go on the:re and that sort of stuff so (1.4)
 6 type of work that you're looking for at the moment
 7 (0.3)
 8 Cla: .ts: (0.2) Er the- (properly) I wanna get into rigs but
 9 apart from that just any nine-to-five job (.) in town. Like
 10 retail or[:
 11 PA: [R- right
 12 (0.5)
 13 PA: So: retail .hhhhhh

Extract 3.2 [054] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: .HHH so- (.) what is your main job goal is it going to be
 2 u:m (0.8) .tch u::h a shop operative retail operative: (0.2)
 3 what would you like to do
 4 Cla: U::m my main goal would be:: (.) eventually working in an
 5 office for like a (higher) like hhh.
 6 PA: That's great then so: (.) trainee- so: trainee clerical
 7 Cla: [() yeah,
 8 PA: administrator yea[h?
 9 Cla: [Yeah
 10 PA: .hhhh Now- (0.4) that's a really:: (0.6) good choi::ce
 11 because: there's plenty of wo::rk on. .hh for (.)
 12 clerical administrators in the area

By reading from the screen, the adviser in the first example asks about job goals in a formulaic, routine manner. The form of words only requires from the claimant a **category** of work. It conveys that there is a box to be completed, rather than inviting a broader discussion of the claimant's goals. By contrast, the adviser's enquiry in Extract 3.2 is formed fully as a question, consisting of three components. The first and third are formed as open questions ('what is your main job goal'; 'what would you like to do'), encouraging the claimant to think about goals rather than categories of work. In the middle component (line 2) the PA mentions a type of work based on what he's already asked about her previous work experience. The claimants' responses to the different formats illustrated in examples 3.1 and 3.2 provide evidence of their different interactional impact, each claimant responding in a way that is fitted to the form of the adviser's enquiry. In the first, the claimant provides a category of work ('retail'); in the second, she opens up a fuller discussion about her 'main goal'.

In addition to focusing on a category of work, the first format also limits the enquiry to a consideration of immediate, rather than longer-term, goals: what work the claimant is looking for 'at the moment'. This limitation is not imposed by the second format. Although the adviser in Extract 3.2 does propose a candidate

option (retail), which could be pursued immediately, this is based on a discussion that occurred shortly before this extract. By sandwiching this between two open questions, the adviser displays that he has listened to her job history (so claimant focused) and yet also opens up the possibility of considering alternatives. In this sense, the second format is more aspirational than the first.

The significance, **for the claimants themselves**, of thinking longer-term, is evident in how they respond: both are interested in pursuing long-term goals. In the first example, the claimant starts by resisting the focus on 'the moment' by reintroducing a longer-term goal he raised near the start of the interview: he wants to work on the rigs. In the second example, the claimant takes the opportunity afforded by the adviser's open question to propose a longer-term goal that she has not yet discussed ('eventually working in an office'). It is only in the second case, however, that the claimant and adviser go on to explore this in relation to the JSAg.

In other cases of the more claimant-focused format, the enquiry is formed differently, but equally openly. For example: *So I'm hoping this is where you (would) tell me what you'd like to do* [069], or *Tell me about what kind of work you see yourself doing* [075]. The third enquiry format is less open, insofar as the adviser suggests a job goal – but this is based on what the PA has learned about a claimant's previous JSAg (as in Extract 3.3), work experience, or specialist training.

Extract 3.3 [107] NJI 25+ (Oct 07)

- 1 PA: Right, now this is the sort of adapted version of your old
- 2 Jobseeker's agreement. This is way out of date.
- 3 Cla: Yes of course.
- 4 PA: Um so I take it the accounting is what you want?
- 5 Cla: It is, yes, so it's basically what they call finance,

There is some evidence that these three formats for asking claimants about their job goals, for the purposes of a JSAg, are associated with different approaches to exploring what work claimants will be seeking.

The third format is more claimant-focused because it is generally associated with some prior discussion about the claimant's work experience, training, career, and future plans; the adviser displays that they are taking into account information that the claimant has given them. It is more commonly used with 25+ claimants. This is most probably because they tend to have a more extensive work/training history and/or a clearer sense of their future goals, rather than because of their age *per se*.¹⁶ Indeed, in one case where an 18-24 claimant had specialist training (a photography degree), which he had discussed with the adviser prior to completing

¹⁶ For further discussion of age differences in relation to agreeing job goals with JSA claimants, see Section 2.2.2 of Irvine *et al.* (2010).

the JSAg, the adviser used this third format when asking him about his job goals: *This is what sort of work you're looking for ... so the architectural photography ...* [102].

There is a slight risk, though, when using this form, of missing opportunities to explore alternative options. This is particularly the case with repeat claimants who already have a JSAg on the system, which advisers might simply read out, seeking confirmation that nothing has changed. In one such interview, the adviser reads out the claimant's job goals ('engineering, admin, clerical') and asks him: *is that all alright for you* [120]. The claimant confirms that it is. Later, however, during the job search, the adviser asks the more open question: *So what is it you actually want to do?* Only at this point, once the JSAg has already been agreed, does the claimant talk about the possibility of going into the navy to get some experience as an engineer.

However this risk of 'missed opportunities' is more pronounced when using the first, process-led format outlined above. This format tends to be associated with a fill-the-boxes approach, with little discussion about the claimant's longer-term goals. By contrast, when using the second, more claimant-focused format, advisers tend to initiate a more extensive discussion of claimants' future employment aspirations, and steps towards fulfilling these. It does not seem that the form of the enquiry itself is the determining factor; the first format does not by itself close off discussing career aspirations, nor is the second format necessarily conducive to such a discussion. Rather, the selection of the process-led format seems to be associated with a more restrictive approach by the adviser; 'filling the boxes' is treated as the main task, and there is a disinclination to ask the claimant about their employment future.

In response to advisers' enquiries about their job goals, claimants are usually able to nominate a primary job goal relatively easily. However, in some cases, claimants may be unsure what they would like to do or are qualified for, or uncertain about how the kind of work they want fits a Jobcentre Plus category (Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code). Difficulties are particularly common when advisers ask claimants to nominate a second or third job goal. In such cases, advisers are often in search of goals that might be considered more 'realistic' in relation to the local labour market. When claimants struggle to name 'appropriate' job goals, it is common for advisers to assist by suggesting types of work they might consider.

Sometimes, misalignments can occur between a claimant's stated job aspirations, qualifications or experience, and the job goals that are suggested (and recorded) by the adviser. These are to some extent linked and include:

- a failure to relate claimants' qualifications and past experience to suggested job goals, resulting in a mismatch between goals and qualifications;
- the relevance of the link between 'background information' about work parameters and specific job goals;

- advisers' perception of claimants' aspirations as unrealistic, in the context of the local labour market.

We consider each of these in the following three sections.

3.3.2 Mismatch between job goals and claimants' qualifications and experience

Sometimes the job goal suggested by the adviser is not commensurate with the claimant's qualifications or aptitudes. In the following extract, the adviser enquires about the claimant's job goals before asking about his qualifications. In response, he explains that he has a fine arts degree. Where it might have been helpful to have taken time to consider the kind of jobs for which the claimant is qualified – at least to find out whether he had any ideas about suitable career paths – the adviser takes the more process-led approach outlined above. She asks directly for a category of work, a job title (line 17), to which the claimant offers printer¹⁷.

Extract 3.4 [147] NJI 25+ (Jan 08)

1 PA: That's what we call your Jobseeker's Agreement on that
 2 screen, um obviously it's blank because, you know, you've
 3 not had a, a claim before or recently, what have you, um and
 4 it's a matter of me kind of filling in the gaps.
 5 Cla: Okay.
 6 PA: And, and asking you questions about your, your job searching
 7 and what have you. Er so can you just tell me at least one
 8 or two types of jobs that you're looking for now and that
 9 you want to do, you know.
 10 Cla: Well I'd like to, cos I, I've been to university.
 11 PA: Yeah.
 12 Cla: And I studied er fine art there.
 13 PA: Oh right.
 14 Cla: So I'd like to go.
 15 PA: Oh my daughter's into that.
 16 Cla: Into er that side.
 17 PA: But in what job though, you know, what would your job title?
 18 Cla: Printing or something like that.

The claimant has been travelling in Australia, and during that time and since returning has done a number of jobs; looking at what the claimant has done previously, the adviser picks one to focus on as a second job goal. This excerpt is a continuation ten lines later.

¹⁷ An additional point is the evident difficulties advisers sometimes have in identifying the correct SOC code for more uncommon job types. Claimants in these scenarios have to agree the 'best fit' from the options the adviser identifies and we have at least one example where lack of clarity on the adviser's part leads to a job goal being entered which is not the career being pursued by the claimant.

Extract 3.5 [147] NJI 25+ (Jan 08)

1 PA: Yeah. God you've done all sorts haven't you? ((laughs))
 2 Yeah, yeah, that's fine. Is labouring kind of like a, a
 3 second or third choice type thing or?
 4 Cla: Yeah, it's, well it's just obviously.
 5 PA: Yeah, yeah, well it's.
 6 Cla: To pay my credit card.
 7 PA: Exactly, yeah, yeah.
 8 Cla: And my travelling debts off basically.
 9 PA: Yeah, as a, as a kind of temporary filling in job, if you
 10 like?
 11 Cla: Yeah.
 12 PA: Yeah, yeah, that's fine love.
 13 Cla: It's been alright for the time being.
 14 PA: Yeah. Now and every job's got a code number and (..) I
 15 haven't a clue what printer is (..) it's twenty-six thousand
 16 on here and I know er about twenty off by heart, not quite
 17 got to the twenty-six thousand yet. (..) But we are assured
 18 every single er ((laughs)).
 19 Cla: ()
 20 PA: Ah great, 5424, I like to get it as specific as I can, you
 21 know. Sometimes it's a bit tricky. (..) 54, what did I say?
 22 24, right. Right, right, is there any other, other than
 23 labouring or, do you want to put labouring as a secondary
 24 one or?
 25 Cla: Can do, yeah.
 26 PA: Yeah, is that all right? Yeah. Do you have anything like
 27 your CSCS card or?
 28 Cla: No I don't have any tickets like that.
 29 PA: Anything like that. Right, OK. I'll give you a little bit of
 30 information in a minute about how you can get that, if you
 31 ever wanted to get it, so. Okay love. So um I'll put as
 32 builder's labourer

Despite the claimant having indicated that he has been a labourer as a temporary measure to pay off his credit card (lines 4, 6, 8 and 13), and his rather reluctant response to putting labouring as his second goal (*Can do, yeah*, line 25), the adviser focuses specifically on that as a second job goal (lines 2-3, then lines 31/32). In so doing, she directs him towards a job goal which is hardly appropriate to his qualifications, and without having given him the opportunity to suggest other options to which he might be more committed. As will be discussed shortly, this is a reflection of how an adviser's predominant interpretation of 'realistic' job goals can be those that are quickly attainable in the local labour market, rather than best suited to a claimant's individual circumstances.

3.3.3 Lack of fit between 'background information' and job goals

Advisers generally refer to information about whether claimants wish to work full-time or part-time; are willing to work shifts, or nights; the shortest contract they would be willing to consider; whether they have their own transport; the distance they are willing to travel to work, and so on, as 'background information'. It

is more usually collected, through pro forma questions, before moving to the JSAg, though in some cases it is collected after the job goals had been agreed. Either way, such background information comes to be detached from considering claimants’ job goals. Because of this detachment, there is sometimes a lack of fit between their answers to these questions, and the agreed job goals.

This is clearly illustrated by comparing the claimant’s initial response – when providing ‘background information’ – that he is willing to work nights, with his preference – when discussing his job goals – for a *nine-to-five job in town* because he is *sick of working nights* (see Extract 3.1). By this time, his willingness to work nights has already been entered on his records.

Extract 3.6 [026] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07)

1 PA: .hh Are you prepared to do shifts

2 (0.6)

3 Cla: Yeah

4 (1.0)

5 PA: Er:: work nights

6 Cla: Yeah

7 (0.6)

8 Cla: I’m used to working nights [so (yeah) bar worker

9 PA: [Yeah right right

10 Cla: I used to be

The claimant in Extracts 3.1 and 3.6 is new to the system. When the adviser began gathering information from him, he said only that ‘we’ll get a bit of background information first of all’, then launched into his first question. He did not explain the purpose of these questions, or make it clear that the claimant had a real choice in how he answered. We have insufficient evidence to tell whether claimants felt compelled to agree to *work nights*, *work shifts* and so on. However, cases such as the one in Extracts 3.3 and 3.6 suggest that first time claimants, particularly, may be unaware that they have a choice; as a result, their answers to questions about background information may not truly reflect their preferences. In general, advisers did not explain that claimants have a choice about these matters. In only one instance of 18-24 NJIs did the adviser do so (shown in Extract 3.7). Although this is a somewhat belated, parenthetical explanation, it may not be coincidence that this is one of the few instances in which the claimant declines on one of the questions.¹⁸

¹⁸

In one of the other rare instances in which a claimant declines [067] on questions of night work, shift work and temporary work, he is aware that these are not appropriate to the work he wants to do. At this stage the adviser does not know the claimant’s job goals, and therefore is unaware of this mismatch. This results in some difficulty that runs through much of the subsequent interview.

Extract 3.7 [119] NJI 18-24 (Nov 07)

1 PA: Okay (.) you happy to do shift wor[k or:
 2 Cla: [Shift work
 3 (0.6)
 4 PA: You can say no to any of them by the [way
 5 Cla: [Yeah
 6 PA: .hh Night work or temporary wo[rk
 7 Cla: [Ehm not night work
 8 PA: But yes to temporary

However, the most significant deficit associated with background information is that – especially when it is collected before beginning the JSAg – it may not be relevant for the claimant's job goals. In one case, in answering whether he would accept *shift work*, *temporary work*, *night work*, a claimant agreed *if that falls into my line of category of work*, thereby anticipating a mismatch with what emerges as his job goal (accountancy). And in one case, in which the adviser collected background information **after** establishing and recording the claimant's job goals (domestic energy assessor and engineering), the adviser likewise acknowledged that 'shifts and nights' may not be relevant (*is it relevant in the type of work that you're looking for?* [152]).

Enquiries about background information are seldom made in the context of, and tailored to, claimants' job goals. Consequently, claimants' answers are frequently inappropriate, and at times irrelevant, to the jobs that it later turns out they want to pursue.

3.3.4 The realism of job goals in relation to labour market opportunities

Claimants sometimes give as their primary job goal a career that does not fall within one of the standard manufacturing, industrial, retail or service sectors, or which is a relatively specialised profession. They do so on the basis of specialist training in, for instance, crystal healing [006], photography [102], printing [147], domestic energy assessment [152], and graphic design [067]. Advisers may treat such non-standard job goals as 'unrealistic', in the sense of not expecting the claimant readily to find that kind of work in the area. This is made explicit in the following example, where the adviser is attempting to agree a second and third job goal with a claimant whose primary job goal is graphic design (for which he has trained to degree level).

Extract 3.8 [067] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: Alright, .hhh u::m what we (tr-) have to try and do is get a
 2 bala::nce:: u::m of (0.4) obviously trying to achieve what
 3 your long term goa:ls are (in the) graphic design and
 4 photography and that's absolutely fi::ne .hhh (0.4) we also
 5 have to inject u::m (0.8) .tch (0.6) a realistic approach to
 6 (.) the local job market and I'm sure you're aware round
 7 he:re there's not a great deal in the way of [graphic design
 8 Cla: [I'm not
 9 looking for work around he:re?

While some job goals may indeed be unrealistic, this assumption may be made without first exploring the claimant's individual situation. For instance, the adviser explains to the claimant with a diploma in crystal healing (which is her primary job goal) that she needs additionally to have *more reasonably attainable* job goals [006]. It turns out subsequently that crystal healing is beginning to be offered in beauty salons; the claimant has previously worked as a hairdresser, has contacts in the industry, and has heard about a possible job opening in a local beauty salon, about which she is going to enquire. Similarly, the graphic design graduate in Extract 3.8, above volunteers – towards the end of the WFI – the information that he has been applying for jobs in graphic design and has an upcoming interview. At no point has the adviser asked the claimant about whether he has been looking for graphic design jobs and with what success. All his advice about job searches has focused on the claimant's secondary job goals, to which the claimant only agreed reluctantly.

While our data suggest that advisers are normally willing to record primary job goals as expressed by the claimant, if the adviser does not feel this goal is 'realistic' then they may encourage claimants to agree to secondary job goals that are unrelated to their qualifications, experience, aspirations, aptitudes and primary goals. It appears that in such cases advisers are often ready to settle quickly on (possibly inappropriate) job goals in order to tick the second and third job goal boxes. Adopting a process-led approach in which the emphasis is on getting a job title as quickly as possible rather than exploring a claimant's career aspirations more fully may result in advisers misjudging what may or may not be a 'realistic' job goal. In the next subsection, however, we show how sometimes advisers take a different approach to establishing secondary job goals. This involves identifying relevant options which serve as 'stepping stones' towards the long-term aspiration rather than more immediate but unrelated 'stop gaps'.

3.3.5 Job goals as 'stepping stones' towards work

There were a number of examples in our dataset of advisers encouraging claimants to consider whether, if their primary goal was not attainable right away, there were other jobs which might serve as 'stepping stones' towards it. We describe this practice as effective for the following reasons:

- it resulted in identifying relevant second and third job goals, and avoiding ones that were poorly matched to claimants' skills, aptitudes, training and experience;
- claimants frequently either resisted or seemed unenthusiastic about unrelated job goals; by contrast, they seemed enthusiastic and convinced by goals identified through the 'stepping stones' approach;
- establishing job goals with which claimants can identify, and to which they can feel committed, is likely to result not only in their **getting** work, but **staying** in work.

In some cases, advisers referred explicitly to identifying second and third goals jobs that might act as stepping stones towards a main job goal. Equally this 'stepping stones' principle was sometimes embedded in a claimant-focused approach, in which the adviser, rather than rushing to 'fill the boxes', opened up discussion about a claimant's goals and how these might be achieved. Whilst terms like 'stepping stones' were sometimes used, this approach was visible less in a specific form of words, and more in the consideration given to 'skills clusters'. The following examples illustrate how advisers can help claimants to consider secondary job goals which might be steps towards their main goal, either by involving similar kinds of work, or by contributing towards their developing suitable skills.

In Extract 3.9, they have had some difficulty establishing the correct category for the claimant's first job goal, eventually deciding on 'software professional'. Although the adviser refers to second and third job goals as 'just back up things' (line 18), he considers short-term goals that require similar skills to those in which the claimant is trained: 'you can get another one that's related to the IT ... it would be ideal if we can keep you in the area that you want to work' (lines 16-17). Thus he broadens the range of the job search while developing a trajectory towards the claimant's longer-term goals.

Extract 3.9 [052] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: .hh right so you're a software professional is [that okay
 2 Cla: [aye
 3 something like that [huh
 4 PA: [right okay
 5 PA: why didn't I think of that
 6 Cla: Well [yeah
 7 PA: [software profess-
 8 Cla: or- or me really (I mean) yeah
 9 PA: software professional right okay what about other kinds of
 10 work=I mean y- you can get another one that's related to the
 11 IT *d:* do you do things like temporary IT user support
 12 you've done this kind of stuff before
 13 Cla: Mm (po[tentially yes)
 14 PA: [I'm just thinking of anything that you can do on a
 15 temporary basis erm rather than signing (.) I mean id- it
 16 would be ideal if we can keep you in the area that you want
 17 to work .hh hopefully you'll get a job in this area but
 18 these are just back up things .hh (.) erm
 ... ((lines omitted during which adviser uses the computer))

23 PA: um IT user support technician .hhh and a third job goal
 24 something temporary?
 25 Cla: Erm I mean I can do computer engineer sm- servicing engineer
 26 and that kind of thing
 27 PA: .h That one we looked at the very firs[t one the
 28 Cla: [Yeah that sort-
 29 PA: comput[er servicing
 30 Cla: [that's the (sort)
 31 PA: Right so .h your jobs are all around around (P) the: the
 32 kind of work that *y* you've got experience in .hh so
 33 comput- comput- it was computer repair wasn't it
 34 Cla: Aye servicing or something [like that
 35 PA: [computer repair and servicing

Again in the following example the adviser names the claimant's primary goal, 'clerical (administrator)', and then moves to considering second and third goals. He focuses the choice of subsidiary job goals on the skills the claimant has, but with a view to developing those in the direction she is aiming for (i.e. towards clerical administration). Indeed shortly after this extract, when they move to consider a third job goal, the claimant suggests 'shop work', which the adviser suggests she avoids if she wants to develop 'white collar skills'.

Extract 3.10 [054] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: .hhhh Trainee clerical- is it all office related work that
 2 you're wanting to do
 3 Cla: .t Yea::h [that'd be great
 4 PA: [Right .hh so:: if I can give you some
 5 guidance on the easiest jobs to get in the a::rea
 6 Cla: Mhm
 7 PA: Call centre work:
 8 Cla: Ye[ah
 9 PA: [O::ka:y, >I'm not saying you have to do it but the thing
 10 is:< (0.2) they're u::sing your claimant se::rvice skills:=
 11 Cla: =Mhm=
 12 PA: =Okay so:: .hh your communication skills- your ability to
 13 sell to peo:ple [.hhh
 14 Cla: [Yeah
 15 PA: Your IT skills are being used so this is all your
 16 transferable skills .hh all being encompassed into one
 17 kind of job and you get trai::ning (0.2) [from day one
 18 Cla: [Yeah
 19 Cla: ↑Oh ↑right
 20 PA: Okay, [.hhh
 21 Cla: [(It) sounds [(good)/(that's excellent)

In neither case does the adviser imply that the claimants need more 'realistic' job goals. Rather, they indicate full support for the primary goals, then go on to encourage the claimants to consider subsidiary goals that either relate to the skill set they already have or will help them develop the skills needed for their main job goal.

3.3.6 Effective practice

It is apparent from our recorded cases of JSAs that difficulties arise more frequently when advisers adopt an approach that is too rigidly process-driven, in which 'ticking the boxes' is begun without having first explored more fully claimants' prior experience and training, their aptitudes, whether they have already applied for jobs and such like. When PAs move quickly into ticking the boxes of the JSA, without having found out more about a claimant's work background and aspirations, WFLs are more likely to be run into i) a mismatch or disjunct between job goals 'agreed' and claimants' training, experience and aptitudes; ii) evident hesitancy, unease and lack of commitment (enthusiasm) on the part of claimants with the job goal(s) 'agreed' and being entered; iii) PAs' misjudgements about what are 'realistic' job goals (e.g. learning that a claimant already has an interview for a job that the PA has deemed 'unrealistic'); and finally iv) a more general disfluency in the interaction between advisers and claimants, indicating a lack of alignment and tension between them over what is emerging.

While there is no specific form of words that seems most effectively to progress the interaction towards agreeing job goals that are realistic, on the one hand, and are in line with claimants' work background, aptitudes and preferences on the other, the approach that has the best chance of avoiding the difficulties noted above is one in which job goals are tailored to an individual claimant's aptitudes. That approach is one in which advisers:

- ask claimants (through more open questions) about their previous work experience, training and preferences – before moving to the JSA and agreeing specific job goals;
- ask explicitly whether claimants have job goals which are different from those they might have had in the past – that is, ask open questions that do not assume that a claimant still wants to do what they have done in the past;
- work with claimants to consider second and third job goals that – whilst broadening the range of the job search – continue to focus on building towards the main goal, focusing on a cluster of related skills;
- are cautious about assuming that less 'normal' (or out-of-the-ordinary) job goals are unrealistic.

3.4 Establishing the steps claimants will take to find work

Key points

- When talking with claimants about job search strategies, advisers commonly provide information in a **standardised** way, giving claimants generic information, which may not address their individual needs.
- Sometimes advisers take a more **tailored** approach by questioning claimants about what they have done to look for work and then fitting any subsequent information provision to their individual needs.
- Advisers also tend to frame their explanations of job search strategies around the conditionality of receiving benefit.
- Less often, they focus on the end point of finding work, framing their explanations in terms of how claimants might be successful in obtaining the work they want.
- When discussion of 'steps towards work' is restricted to the conditionality associated with the JSAg, there is a tendency for advisers to minimise what claimants need to do.
- Effective practice involves discussing with claimants the ways in which they could be **proactive** in searching for work, rather than simply telling them how to meet the minimum requirements for claiming JSA.
- Explicitly inviting claimants to commit to taking specific steps towards work is also more effective than simply telling them about job search options.

3.4.1 Talking about job search strategies: standardised compared to tailored information provision

A key element of the JSAg is the list of 'job search steps' that the claimant is expected to take in an effort to find work. These include: writing to, telephoning or visiting employers; contacting Jobseeker Direct (by telephone or by using the internet); asking family, friends and people with whom the claimant has worked before; and looking in specified newspapers or trade papers. When constructing a JSAg with claimants, advisers are required to inform them about these various alternatives. In many cases they do this in a **standardised** way; but in some, they **tailor** the information to the claimant's circumstances, work experience or qualifications.

An example of standardised information provision is shown in Extract 3.11. The adviser informs the claimant about a range of job search strategies that are entirely generic (i.e. he could be speaking to any jobseeker). The way he delivers

the information conveys this: he lists a set of options, which he himself marks as 'obvious' (line 2). Although we cannot illustrate this in a written report, his tone also conveys this as something he is 'reeling off' and, indeed, he provides almost identical information, in almost the same way, in the other NJIs he recorded for us. This approach to information provision is, then, largely scripted.

Extract 3.11 [026] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07)

1 PA: Now how you contact people is entirely up to yourself I
2 mean you can obviously phone people up you can send them
3 letters you can visit them .hh you can even do it through
4 ourselves

A contrasting example, in which the adviser provides more tailored information, is shown in 3.12. Here the adviser explicitly links the strategy ('registering with some agencies') to the claimant's individual requirements.

Extract 3.12 [069] NJI 25+ (Aug 07)

1 PA: For the type of work you're looking for the butcher and the
2 factory worker in particular you really need to think about
3 registering with some agencies because a lot of that work
4 goes through agencies

There are two key problems with providing information in a standardised fashion. First, because claimants have usually begun looking for work before making a claim, it often turns out that they already have the generic information. For example, if we consider what happens next in Extract 3.11 (continued as Extract 3.13), we see evidence that the adviser has not offered this claimant anything he does not already know. Like the adviser, he treats the information as 'not news', responding: *yeah well* (line 5), followed by an account of what he has already done to look for work. As it turns out, he has not only tried one of the strategies suggested by the adviser – visiting potential employers (lines 5-11) – but also another that has not yet been mentioned: applying online (line 14).

Extract 3.13 [026] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07) – immediate continuation of Extract 3.11

5 Cla: Yeah well: I've currently: put a load of CVs out
 6 PA: Mhm
 7 Cla: round town
 8 (0.3)
 9 PA: Ri[ght
 10 Cla: [(Been right the way) through the town centre and
 11 ((Company Name)) an:
 12 PA: Yeah
 13 (0.2)
 14 Cla: (applied online)
 15 (0.2)
 16 PA: Right

Second, given that claimants have usually started looking for work but are now making a claim to benefit, they typically have stories of **failed** job searches. In other words, the generic strategies have not proved successful so far. This is the case for the claimant in Extracts 3.11 and 3.13. Despite already having done what the adviser is now suggesting, he has made no progress: *they've just said nowt back really* (line 17).

Extract 3.14 [026] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07) – immediate continuation of Extract 3.13

17 Cla: An[d they've just said nowt ba[ck really
 18 PA: [Yeah [Well) that's fine
 19 Cla: .hhh
 20 (0.2)
 21 PA: Well like I say I mean er::::m (0.9) .hhh there's like the
 22 Jobseeker Direct that we do
 23 (11.2) ((typing))
 24 PA: And you can either do that through the phone or the
 25 internet=
 26 Cla: =Yeah:
 27 PA: .hhh
 28 (13.6) ((typing))
 29 PA: °(There) yeah° ((talking to self while typing))
 30 (0.7)
 31 PA: Er:::m (0.7) like I say: (.) that's our (0.6) particular
 32 job site there are [(actually) other (other) job [sites
 33 Cla: [Yeah [Mm
 34 PA: and [things on the internet
 35 Cla: [I've got a little card (.) [with the]
 36 PA: [Yeah] with with all
 37 [the things on it
 38 Cla: [number on it yeah

Advisers need, therefore, to be prepared to provide information that addresses the specific difficulties claimants may already have encountered in looking for work. In Extract 3.14, the adviser does not do this. Instead, he continues providing standardised information, which he marks as simply a reiteration of what has been said before: *well like I say* (line 21). As it turns out, the next round of information

he offers is also of little use to the claimant, who already has the *little card* (line 35) with details about Jobseeker Direct.

By contrast, in the following example, the adviser takes a more tailored approach. In order to do this, he starts, not by providing information, but by asking the claimant about what she has already done to look for work. Such questions allow advisers to elicit the sort of information that the adviser in Extracts 3.13 and 3.14 only obtains by chance – because the claimant happens to volunteer it. By establishing what claimants already know, and have tried, advisers have a basis for tailoring any subsequent information provision to their individual requirements. For example, in Extract 3.15, the adviser addresses the claimant's lack of success at interview: he gets her to consider obtaining feedback (lines 20-25), to which she responds favourably (lines 26-27).

Extract 3.15 [075] NJI 25+ (Sep 07)

1 PA: Have you looked at many vacancies or have you seen um much
2 around or?
3 Cla: Yeah, I've been for a few interviews
4 PA: Have you?
5 Cla: Yeah
6 PA: Oh and that's for care, for care jobs?
7 Cla: Yeah.
8 PA: So whereabouts um have you seen the jobs advertised or where
9 er where have they been?
10 Cla: Some in ((newspaper name)) and some off friends.
11 PA: Oh right, so talking to friends. Are they friends who are
12 working in care already
13 Cla: Yeah
14 PA: Um okay got you. And how much um sort of, what kind of
15 feedback have you been getting when you've been going for
16 the interviews
17 Cla: None.
18 PA: Have you not?
19 Cla: No
20 PA: Have you, so I take it, so you haven't been successful? Have
21 you um, have you, have you thought about that at all um,
22 have you been back and asked them for any feedback?
23 Cla: No
24 PA: What they're looking for anything like that? Could you see
25 any value in doing that at all or?
26 Cla: Well I could yeah I suppose I could like some friends work
27 at the one at ((place name)) where I went.

Standardised information provision – which involves little more than reading out what is printed on the standard JSaG – epitomises a 'process-led' approach, meaning that the adviser's primary focus is on meeting the basic requirements of the benefits system. By contrast, tailored information provision involves taking a more 'claimant-focused' approach by eliciting the claimant's story and fitting any subsequent information provision to their individual needs. This latter approach reflects the current policy focus on 'personalised' support.

3.4.2 Talking about job search strategies: conditionality compared to work-focus

In addition to whether advisers take a standardised or tailored approach, there is another significant feature of how they talk with claimants about searching for work. Most commonly, PAs emphasised the **conditionality** of receiving benefit; they framed their explanations around what claimants had to do to show they had actively been seeking work. Less often, they focused on the end point of actually **finding work**; they framed their explanations around how claimants might be successful in obtaining the work they wanted.

Extracts 3.16 and 3.17 illustrate the first of these approaches. Extract 3.16 shows a relatively condensed version of a conditionality-based approach to explaining what claimants are required to do to look for work (the adviser herself refers to *running through (it) ... fast*). In this case the adviser only implies conditionality, in such phrases as *you know what you've signed up to* and *all it's asking you to do*. However, advisers frequently refer to conditionality more explicitly, as in Extract 3.17.

Extract 3.16 [104] NJI 25+ (Oct 07)

- 1 PA: So if I just run through this with you, if I'm going too
- 2 fast or you don't understand, stop me. You'll get a copy of
- 3 all this, we print it all off at the end so you know what
- 4 you've signed up to. All it's asking you to do is use our
- 5 services, now our services are either a telephone call, the
- 6 Internet, um or you can come in and see us twice a week.
- 7 Cla: Mm hmm.
- 8 PA: Um to keep a written record of your job search. I will give
- 9 you a little locally produced form, your name on it and you
- 10 just write down everything you do. So I've applied for jobs
- 11 in the paper, yeah, not, don't worry about it being a huge
- 12 monologue of every time you've done anything.
- 13 Cla: No.
- 14 PA: Just basics. Apply for two jobs a week, that's only if
- 15 they're available in your field so don't worry about that.
- 16 Attend fifteen minutes before signing to use our job points,
- 17 the upturned shavers at the front.
- 18 Cla: Yeah.
- 19 PA: Um if you use the Internet that day don't worry about it. I
- 20 don't know, do you have the Internet at home?
- 21 Cla: I do, yeah.
- 22 PA: I would always suggest people use that for their job search
- 23 if they've got it.

Extract 3.17 [085] NJI 25+ (Oct 07)

1 PA: So yeah, Job Seeker's Direct on there, er job searches, now
 2 we put at least weekly on there basically because in order
 3 to get Jobseeker's Allowance you must be available for work
 4 and seen to be [looking for work
 5 Cla: [Yeah yeah.
 6 PA: And although we don't expect people to be looking for work
 7 twenty-fours a day seven days a week we do expect them to be
 8 doing [something at least er a weekly basis
 9 Cla: [oh yeah, yeah.

As the above examples illustrate, the central feature of this format is that the required job search activities are explained in the context of outlining the contractual obligations of the JSaG. Searching for work is discussed in terms of fulfilling the conditions of JSA.

By contrast, advisers sometimes prioritise – not the conditionality of looking for work – but just how much claimants should be doing to find work. It is difficult to illustrate this approach in a short extract, because it is not confined to a single explanation; but this next example illustrates its key features.

Near the beginning of this interview, the adviser has clearly explained its purpose (*looking to make sure you've got a clear idea of the kind of work you're looking for ... and how you're going to go about getting that work*); he has explained that they will sign a JSaG *basically reflecting everything we've talked about*; and he has asked the claimant about his educational background. He then establishes that the claimant wants to be an apprentice plater, bricklayer or plasterer. On this basis he suggests some websites that might provide relevant information about apprenticeships, and mentions a local drop-in agency. They then discuss in some detail the kind of work in which the claimant is interested and the available training schemes. In the following extract, the adviser begins by summarising their discussion, before starting to enquire about what the claimant has been doing to look for work.

Extract 3.18 [079] NJI 18-24 (Sep 07)

1 PA: Ehm you're looking fo:r a ideally an apprenticeship in a
 2 construction trade. .hh You've applied for plating. But it
 3 sounds like (.) that's not particularly important to you. As
 4 long as it's construction trade. That would .hh
 5 [that would suffice.
 6 Cla: [Yeah
 7 Cla: Yeah
 8 PA: Erm (.) You're gonna go and visit the ((names drop-in
 9 service)) by the end of the week. And find out whether they
 10 know of anything in the area.
 11 Cla: [Yeah
 12 PA: [Erm You're also gonna make an appointment with ((company))
 13 to discuss erm .hh construction training available.
 14 (.)

15 PA: Er:m It sounds as though you're doing a regular internet job
 16 search are you. You're on the [internet? How of- how often
 17 Cla: [(Yeah ()
 18 PA: do you go on?
 19 Cla: Er:m quite a lot.
 20 (.)
 21 Cla: I'm on there quite a lot.
 22 (0.4)
 23 PA: So two or three times a week?
 24 (.)
 25 Cla: Yeah. something like that. Ye[ah
 26 PA: [Okay
 27 (1.6)
 28 PA: And do you have your own computer at home.
 29 or a[ccess to a com[puter.
 30 Cla: [I- [I do yeah
 31 PA: Okay
 32 (0.4)
 33 PA: Erm (3.0) Do you look any where else at all for work.
 34 or jobs. [anything-
 35 Cla: [erm Newspapers. I got- () a few newspaper
 36 cuttings in there.
 37 (.)
 38 PA: Is that the ((names newspaper)) is it or:
 39 Cla: Er:: I think so. Ye[ah
 40 PA: [Okay
 41 (4.3)
 42 Cla: And I've er rang up companie:s and that.
 43 PA: Have you. Whi[ch-
 44 Cla: [Ask- asking if they've got apprenticeships and
 45 that.
 46 (2.0)
 47 Cla: hhhhhhhhhh
 48 PA: .hh So in terms of a fall back position. If you don't find a
 49 job in erm (0.3) sort of an apprenticeship. Erm .hh what
 50 other kinds of work would you consider to tide you over in
 51 the er in the short term

The key feature of the way this adviser approaches when and how often the claimant will get in touch with an agency, look on the internet and so on, is that they are framed as steps towards work. Conditionality is not mentioned in this context (and indeed although the PA emphasises and asks the claimant to commit to certain job search activities, he does not frame these in terms of benefit conditionality). The adviser does not explain that the claimant should take these steps **in order to get JSA**. Rather, he instead encourages the claimant to see that he will need to take certain steps **in order to be successful in his job search**. This latter approach is both more clearly work-focused, and more personalised than the conditionality-based approach illustrated in Extracts 3.16 and 3.17. Indeed, as can be seen in how the adviser questions the claimant in Extracts 3.18, a work-focused approach goes hand-in-hand with the tailored approach to information provision discussed in the previous section.

3.4.3 'All you need to do ...': minimising what claimants are expected to do to find work

Advisers are required not only to inform claimants about job search strategies but also to record on the JSAG those steps which a claimant has agreed to undertake in order to find work. The JSAG states that claimants are required to undertake three 'steps' each week as a condition of receiving benefit. Exactly what was agreed with any individual claimant, however, was variable in our dataset. Advisers' suggestions ranged from proposing that the claimant register with *at least seven agencies ... [because] the more employment agencies you register with ... the quicker you will be in work* [054] through to simply asking the claimant to check Jobcentre Plus's website 'once a week just to keep an eye on the type of work that we're offering' (see Extract 3.19).

When advisers use the format for talking about job search strategies which stresses the **conditionality** of looking for work, they tend to **minimise** what claimants are expected to do; they explain the **minimum** requirements for claiming JSA. This is generally along the lines of carrying out a particular activity *at least twice a week* or *at least on a weekly basis*. However, it is a small step from explaining that something should be done *at least twice a week*, to the formulation that it needs to be done *just twice a week*. Downgrading 'at least' to 'just' transforms the minimum that should be done into **all** that it is necessary to do. The highlighted lines of the following extract illustrate this clearly.

Extract 3.19 [152] NJI 25+ (Jan 08)

| | | |
|----|------|--|
| 1 | PA: | So:: er do you use the Job Centre Plus website for job |
| 2 | | search ((claimant's name)) or have you ever used the |
| 3 | | Jobcentre Plus website? |
| 4 | Cla: | No. |
| 5 | PA: | Would you have a look at it just once a week just to |
| 6 | | keep an eye [on the type of work that we're offering (.) |
| 7 | Cla: | [Yeah |
| 8 | PA: | okay. Do you use more specialised [websites |
| 9 | Cla: | [Yeah |
| 10 | PA: | Yeah |
| 11 | | ((16 seconds)) |
| 12 | PA: | I'll just put on a weekly basis I mean obviously how often |
| 13 | | you go on then is entirely up to you .hhh |

The transformation from 'at least' into 'no more than' occurs explicitly in Extract 3.20. Here the adviser begins, quite properly, by emphasising that the claimant should phone *at least two employers every week* (lines 2 and 11). However, by then suggesting that phoning an agency will *cut it down to only needing to actually phone one other employer as well*, she strongly conveys that that is as much as the claimant needs to do – and that moreover, he does not need actually to apply for two jobs a week (lines 16-17).

Extract 3.20 [181] NJI 18-24 (Jan 08)

1 PA: We do feel it's quite reasonable to expect you to be able to
 2 contact **at least two employers every week**. .hh Would you
 3 agree. That you'd be able to do that?
 4 (0.2)
 5 Cla: ((Croaky)) Okay.
 6 PA: Yeh? .hh And how to you think you'll make contact with
 7 employers.
 8 (0.3)
 9 Cla: Probably by phone.
 10 PA: Yep. That's smashing. .hh So we'll put on there that
 11 **you'll phone at least two employers every week**. Yeah?
 12 (3.2)
 13 PA: .hhh And one of the those phone calls could be to ((name))
 14 agency. O[kay
 15 Cla: [Okay
 16 PA: .hh Erm (.) which cuts it down to only needing to actually
 17 **phon:e one other employer as well**. Okay.
 18 (38.6)
 19 PA: Okay? So I've just put that you'll **make weekly contact** with
 20 employers including ((agency name)) .hh er by telephone to
 21 ask about and apply for suitable vacancies.

Then a little later, after the adviser has looked to find *quite a few vacancies there*, and therefore the claimant has the opportunity to explore more than one, the adviser strongly biases her question (lines 9-10) towards advising him only to follow up one – which is the agreed outcome (see the claimant's response, line 11).

Extract 3.21 [181] NJI 18-24 (Jan 08) – continued from Extract 20

1 PA: What you might want to consider doing is ringing the
 2 employer to find out whereabouts the work is located.
 3 Cla: Okay
 4 PA: And then making a decision as to whether you want to apply
 5 for it from there. So do you want to apply for this one,
 6 Cla: Er yeah okay.
 7 PA: Yep
 8 (13.5)
 9 PA: Okay. .hh Any others? Or do you want to leave it at that one
 10 just for [now.
 11 Cla: [Er Yeah. See how that one goes

Sometimes this minimising is made even more explicit, as in Extract 3.22. It is evident that the adviser has no expectation that this claimant will seriously look for work, because she is pregnant. In explaining what she needs to do, he emphasises the conditions of claiming JSA (lines 9-10 and 16-18), rather than the kinds of steps that may be required for a successful job search. It later turns out that this claimant already has two interviews lined up; she is seriously looking for work. The adviser's minimal expectations reflect an assumption about her that is misplaced.

Extract 3.22 [109] NJI 18-24 (Oct 07)

1 PA: Um okay, you have to keep a record of what you've been doing
 2 to look for work
 3 Cla: Yeah
 4 PA: Um so you can use that or you keep your own records,
 5 whatever's easiest for you
 6 Cla: Yeah ok[ay
 7 PA: [Um (...) just bring it in with you come to sign.
 8 Cla: Yeah.
 9 PA: As long as they can see you're making an effort, that's
 10 all they're worried [about
 11 Cla: [OK
 12 PA: And like I say, with you being pregnant obviously um
 13 ((claimant's name)) not your fault if if you're not going
 14 to get [a lot of erm interviews or or [job job offers um but
 15 Cla: [Mm hm [Yeah
 16 PA: as long as you're trying and applying, that's all [they're
 17 Cla: [Yeah
 18 PA: worried about

In such cases, claimants are being 'trained' into a culture of 'doing all you need to do' to satisfy the conditions of benefit; they are not being encouraged to be proactive, and to do as much as they can to conduct a successful job search. That culture is embodied in conditionality-focused explanations such as, *all it's asking you to do...is to use our services twice a week. That means either coming in phoning or on the website...apply for two jobs a week...* [119].

Minimising what claimants need to do to look for work is further evident in the ways job search activities are frequently described by PAs. It was common for advisers to check which job search strategies claimants were able to use (e.g. whether they have access to the internet and know how to use the jobpoints). They were not often, however, given an explicit opportunity to agree to specific job search steps in the way they were asked to agree to specific job goals. Rather, if a step was deemed realistic for the claimant, the adviser would often simply write it into the JSAG. Sometimes, advisers would tell the claimant they were doing so (e.g. *so I've put that on there* [147]). Sometimes they completed the JSAG, without stating what they were doing, in between informing claimants about job search strategies. The problem with this approach is that it does not elicit the claimant's commitment to performing the designated steps towards work.

Compare, for example, Extracts 3.23 and 3.24. In both, the claimants are informed about the standard job search options open to them: they can call Jobseeker Direct, use the jobpoints or the internet. However, in 3.23, the claimant is simply told she has a choice (*it's up to you which you use*, lines 10-11), whereas in 3.24 the claimant is asked to make that choice there and then: *which one of those three options would be the better one for you* (lines 10 and 12). Similarly, in 3.23, the claimant is simply told what is expected of her (lines 22-27), whereas in 3.24 she is asked to decide for herself how often she will use the jobpoints (line 20-27).

Extract 3.23 [050] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: Ehm: (0.5) >just a couple of other bits< we need to change,
 2 (0.6) You'll get a copy of this to take home with you. (and)
 3 have my phone number on. .hh (It'll) also have this phone
 4 number on here for the jobseekers direct. .hh You can ring
 5 that number (0.1) it's charged at local rates (0.5) ehm:
 6 (0.3) .tch they will do a job search for you over the phone.
 7 (0.5) I can also put the(ir) website address on there for
 8 you,
 9 Cla: Y[eah
 10 PA: [if you- (.) happy- happier doing that, it's up to you
 11 which you use,
 13 PA: °Ehm:°
 14 (3.6)
 15 PA: Ehm:
 16 (1.0)
 17 PA: Do you know what the job points downstairs are?
 18 (0.2)
 19 Cla: >Yeah<
 20 PA: Yeah.
 21 (12.3)
 22 PA: Right. So all I'm asking you is on the day you're in here to
 23 sign on anyway (.) if you could use the job points:. see if
 24 there's any jobs. Okay, .tchh (.) Ehm: (.) We would expect
 25 that you would (.) contact at least two employers a week.
 26 (0.1)
 27 PA: and contact us twice a week using (those) methods he[re.
 28 Cla: [Mm.

Extract 3.24 [078] NJI 18-24 (Sep 07)

1 PA: .hh I mean [is that is that fair to say that that's
 2 Cla: [Yeah
 3 PA: probably something that you'll- I mean .hh you've got three
 4 options basically. You can either phone up and get a job
 5 search done on: using what we call Jobseeker Direct. .hh You
 6 can come in and use the jobpoints whenever you want. .hh
 7 [Erm or alternatively you could use the internet if you had
 8 Cla: [Yeah
 9 PA: internet access somewhere. Or you know at the library or or
 10 sort of anywhere it was provided. .hh [Erm which one of
 11 Cla: [Yeah
 12 PA: those three options would be the better one for you. For for
 13 searching our database of jobs.
 14 Cla: Probably coming here and looking on the com[puter.
 15 PA: [Okay
 16 So visiting the job centre and checking.
 17 (.)
 18 Cla: Yeah
 19 (0.9)
 20 PA: And how often do you think you are likely to do that.
 21 (1.1)
 22 Cla: Erm (0.5) I can do it like once a week. Or something. Or
 23 twice a week.
 24 PA: Okay
 25 (0.6)
 26 PA: Twice weekly, that kind [of th- that kind of thing? Okay
 27 Cla: [Yeah

The effectiveness of the latter approach is evident in the following extract, where, after informing the claimant about the services available through Connexions (an external provider), the adviser gets him to commit to visiting them. This is subsequently written into his JSAg. By contrast, it was common for advisers to go no further than providing the relevant information; claimants were typically left to decide (presumably after the interview) whether or not to attend.

Extract 3.25 [079] NJI 18-24 (Sep 07)

1 PA: Is it fair to say that you'll go and visit them
 2 Cla: Yeah
 3 PA: When when do you think you'll have done that by.
 4 (.)
 5 Cla: Er:m Well I could go right now,
 6 (0.3)
 7 PA: Alright,
 8 (0.3)
 9 PA: So you'll have probably gone to see Connexions by the end of
 10 the week [anyway. Certainly.
 11 Cla: [Yeah

3.4.4 Effective practice – gaining claimants' commitment to undertaking steps towards work

It follows, therefore, that **effective practice** consists of explaining what a claimant should do to search for work or how to take other steps towards successfully finding work; and gaining claimants' commitment to undertaking those job search activities. Whilst advisers, quite properly, explain what claimants need to do to meet the requirements of their JSAg, the tendency thereby to minimise job search activities is likely to fail to convey how much claimants need to do in order to successfully find work. It is likely to be more effective to emphasise that success in finding work depends on doing as much as possible, following up as many possibilities as possible, and being pro-active (e.g. some advisers refer to making 'speculative contact' with potential employers). Steps towards work are best discussed in a way which is explicitly **work-oriented** – not restricted to an orientation to conditions of benefit.

It should be noted that in this case – in relation to PAs' tendency to minimise what claimants need to do in order to meet the conditionality of their benefit – our assessment of what is likely to be effective practice is based largely on the supposition that minimising claimant expectations about what they should be doing to find work is likely to suppress their job search activities; and that by contrast, emphasising what else they might do to look for work is likely to enhance their job search activities. That is, the kinds of criteria (e.g. claimant response, and progression) outlined in Chapter 2 are less relevant as a basis for our finding about the relevant ineffectiveness of minimising expectations concerning job search activities. Nevertheless, there is evidence – during the interview itself – that (although they do this only rarely) when PAs pursue how much more a claimant should do to find work, claimants are more likely to be 'recruited' to certain activities and programmes, in ways that resemble 'turnarounds'. For instance, a

claimant who had already phoned Connexions 'some time ago' and 'didn't find them particularly helpful', is persuaded to visit them in person immediately after the WFI (case [079]), which amounts to a turnaround; he is persuaded also to phone for an induction appointment for a relevant apprenticeship training course. So there is some direct evidence that a more proactive approach towards job search activities results in successfully changing claimants' attitudes to looking for work and committing to taking steps towards employment.

A more proactive approach to job search activities – one which does not rest on the minimum that claimants need to do to fulfill conditionality, but which instead pursues a fuller range of ways that claimants should seek employment – is one in which advisers:

- avoid minimising what claimants need to do to look for work;
- begin with open questions about what the claimant has already been doing to find work;
- ask follow-up questions to focus on specific job search strategies and/or difficulties the claimant may have encountered;
- address claimants' difficulties with previous job search strategies;
- tailor information to the individual claimant;
- focus on what the claimant really needs to do in order to find the work they want;
- encourage the claimant to be proactive in searching for work;
- invite claimants' explicit commitment to undertaking specific steps towards work.

3.5 Conducting a job search

Key points

- Advisers conducted a job search in 15 of the 20 NJIs (75 per cent) with claimants aged 18-24 and in 12 of the 22 NJIs (55 per cent) with those aged 25+.
- The job search is about more than finding vacancies: it affords advisers opportunities to support claimants by providing tailored instruction and encouragement.
- If advisers conduct job searches in a standardised, process-led fashion, they not only risk missing opportunities to provide personalised support, but they risk highlighting jobs for which the claimant is **not** suited.
- When explaining what claimants might do to follow up vacancies, advisers sometimes focus on what claimants must do to meet the conditions of JSA.
- By focusing on the job itself, advisers can provide claimants with the support they need to make suitable applications.

3.5.1 Differences in job searches with 18-24 and 25+ claimants

Advisers conducted a job search in 15 of the 20 NJIs (75 per cent) with claimants aged 18-24 and in 12 of the 22 NJIs (55 per cent) with those aged 25+. With 18-24 claimants, advisers usually gave a reason if they did not conduct a job search (e.g. lack of time if additional concerns had to be addressed, such as backdating a claim), implying that they felt a search ought, ideally, to have been conducted. With 25+ claimants, advisers were more likely simply to not mention the option of doing a search there and then. This may relate to the greater likelihood of 25+ claimants having a clear career history, a clearer path back into work, and more experience both of Jobcentre Plus and of job searching more generally.

Irrespective of age, most claimants in our sample had already begun looking for work; some had used the jobpoints or Jobseeker Direct website shortly before attending the interview. However, it was rare for advisers to treat this as a reason not to conduct a job search. There is evidence to support the effectiveness of this tendency. Partly, this has to do with advisers' ability to identify additional vacancies to those found by claimants, even when searching on the same system.¹⁹ But perhaps more important are the opportunities for supporting the claimant that are opened up by conducting a job search together. Two of the themes that we explored in the previous section run through our analysis here too:

- the importance of **tailoring** the discussion when conducting a job search; and
- the advantages of focusing on **work** rather than conditionality.

3.5.2 Conducting a job search: a standardised compared to a tailored approach

For those claimants who have not previously used Jobseeker Direct (or similar websites), the job search is an opportunity for the adviser to explain how the system works. For example, rather than simply conducting the search on the claimant's behalf, an adviser may engage the claimant in the search process, explaining what he is doing (e.g. how to generate *as many hits as possible* [050]), and how to read the output of the search: *just so you know what you're looking at here, this tells you (the) type of job it is, where it is, the wage, the hours and whether it's permanent, and any description with these. Now the title of this is checkout supervisor* [050].

How the adviser talks through the vacancies with claimants, however, is important, irrespective of whether or not they are experienced at job searching. Just as we showed in relation to informing claimants about job search strategies, advisers may take a more standardised, process-led approach to discussing vacancies, or a more claimant-focused approach. Extracts 3.26 and 3.27 illustrate this contrast. In Extract 3.26, the search produces three results, each of which the adviser reads

¹⁹ This is likely to be due partly to advisers' greater experience and proficiency at job searching. However, as one adviser explained to a claimant [085], it may also have to do with advisers' ability to search using specific job codes.

off the screen: 'at the moment there's claimant service at ... there's an opticians ... and there's a sales assistant'. Here the job search serves as little more than an exercise in identifying vacancies.

Moreover, the adviser highlights jobs for which he already knows the claimant is **not** suited. Through earlier questioning, he has established that she speaks only English and holds no qualifications ('not even a school swimming certificate'). As a result, only the third of the jobs he lists is a serious possibility for her. In reading out all three, the adviser implies not only that the service he has to offer is generic (rather than individualised), but also that the claimant may have a hard time finding a job she is able to do.

Extract 3.26 [024] NJI 18-24 (Jul 07)

1 PA: Er::: at the moment there's claimant service at ((Place
2 name)) er:m (.) .hh ((Company name)) personnel want some
3 claimant people but you need to ha- speak a European
4 language
5 Cla: ((laughs))
6 (1.0)
7 PA: .hh There's an opticians wants somebody who er knows
8 about spectacles and things to be an optician assistant .h
9 and there's a sales assistant for ((shop name))

By contrast, in 3.27, the adviser provides more individualised support, tailored to the claimant's circumstances. The claimant, who is looking to relocate, has just completed an IT degree. He is familiar with searching for jobs through specialist websites. Nevertheless, the adviser not only identifies some job opportunities the claimant had not considered before (see lines 10 and 12), but provides guidance on making the move (taking an interim job as a 'springboard') and what to say in a covering letter to an employer. He is also very positive about the vacancies, building a case for why they would be worth applying for (e.g. the first vacancy would help him to relocate; the second offers a host of positive features, see lines 33-39). The adviser draws explicit links between these advantages and what the claimant has already told him (*by looking at what you've done in the past ...I think that would be great for you*, lines 28-33). By providing this kind of tailored support and encouragement, the adviser demonstrates the relevance of the vacancies (they fit the claimant's stated goals) and the relevance of his advice (it is built around the example of actual vacancies).

Extract 3.27 [052] NJI 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: ((Name of town)) (right then put in /either >permanent or<)
2 temporarily .hh (.) computer support will need knowledge of
3 Microsoft Operating systems and M-Of- oh- MS Office no
4 experience necessary training provided on company software
5 .hh duties include this is the IT support but it's [getting
6 Cla: [Yeah
7 PA: you in to ((town)) [.hh
8 Cla: [mm hm
9 PA: I'm just trying help you make the transition
10 Cla: [no ye:s I've ne- I'd never really thought of doing this
11 PA: [from ((this area)) over to there
12 Cla: but yeah it's a good idea [really
13 PA: [erm
14 PA: it's it's a- it's a lau- it's a springboard for you
15 [isn't it to do something like that .hh you know hopefully
16 Cla: [mm hm
17 PA: you're gonna get the job that you want to do straight away
18 .h but rather than saying "well I'm signing on at the
19 minute" you're working in the ((name of)) area .hh cos
20 applying for work out of area is som- the employer sometimes
21 worries er is he gonna be ab- he's gonna need to be
22 rehoused he's got all these [issues
23 Cla: [mm hm
24 PA: .hh can he do it (.) and you need to put a good covering
25 letter in saying that you've got accommodation already set
26 up .hh so if you if you you get a job in the ((name of))
27 area .hh erm then you're- you're on way to your career
((Lines omitted during which the PA identifies and describes another
vacancy))
28 PA: .hh now interestingly by looking at what you've done in the
29 past [.hh you've had this training role in the-
30 Cla: [mm hm
31 Cla: Ye[ah
32 PA: [before haven't you
33 PA: I think that would be great for you (.) erm it gets you
34 into the area you want to get into .h (.) it's- it's a m-
35 it's a higher starting salary than we've already agreed
36 that you'd look for [work from .hh and you're getting the
37 Cla: [mm hm
38 PA: right kind of experience and ma- and networking and
39 meet[ing people
40 Cla: [mm hm
41 PA: how would that one sound
42 Cla: Yeah aye

3.5.3 Conducting a job search: conditionality compared to work-focus

Having identified some potential vacancies, advisers usually inform claimants about how to follow up those in which they might be interested (e.g. whether to use a Jobcentre Plus application form or obtain one from the employer, send a CV or call Jobseeker Direct). Just as we showed in relation to talk about job search strategies, advisers may frame this information primarily around the conditionality of receiving benefit or how claimants might be successful in obtaining work. The first example below illustrates a focus on conditionality: the claimant is told to

enquire about the vacancies they have printed off during the NJI – *even if you're not interested* – in order to satisfy Jobcentre Plus that she is making an *effort to apply*.

Extract 3.28 [122] NJI 18-24 (Nov 07)

1 PA: Let me go and get all those prints for you a minute.
 2 Cla: Cool.
 3 ((40 seconds))
 4 PA: Right, you've picked up quite a few details here, have you
 5 ever looked at these before (..) so you know how to find
 6 your way round them? Just, it's the bottom part that will
 7 tell you what you need to do. So what we ask, because it's
 8 noted on our system.
 9 Cla: Yeah.
 10 PA: Is that you enquire about all the jobs you've asked for
 11 details on.
 12 Cla: Yeah.
 13 PA: And that you make sure you leave your name (..) even if
 14 you're not interested.
 15 Cla: Mm hmm.
 16 PA: So we can say no you're not interested in that job but you
 17 did actually make the effort to apply.
 18 Cla: Yeah.

By contrast, in the next example, the adviser takes time to check if the claimant is interested enough to apply before printing details of the vacancy he has identified. Moreover, his explanation of how to apply is tailored to what he knows about the claimant – that she wants to get help with updating her CV. While the emphasis in the previous example was on the claimant meeting the conditions of JSA, here the emphasis is on supporting the claimant to make a suitable and timely application for a job in which she has expressed an interest.

Extract 3.29 [075] NJI 25+ (Sep 07)

1 PA: Anything jumping out at you?
 2 Cla: That sales assistant in ((place name)).
 3 PA: Oh well let's have a look, sales assistant ((place name))
 4 that one ((company name))?
 5 Cla: Yeah.
 6 PA: That one there?
 7 ((7 seconds))
 8 PA: How would you feel about sales?
 9 Cla: Hmm?
 10 PA: Would you give it try?
 11 Cla: Yeah.
 12 PA: Alright, they're looking for um either an application form
 13 or a CV, um would you be interested er enough to fill in an
 14 application form or er?
 15 Cla: Yeah.
 16 PA: Right (..) what would you prefer to do, are you going to go
 17 over and get your CV sorted out at Learning Links or do you
 18 want me to get you um an application form that you can fill
 19 in and just send off straightaway?
 20 Cla: Well I'll be going over there tomorrow anyway so I could

21 just send me CV off.
22 PA: All right, is that what you prefer to do?
23 Cla: Yeah.
24 PA: Well if you don't get it done in time then obviously um you
25 could always call in here and get like a Jobcentre
26 application form.
27 Cla: Yeah.

As we showed in Section 3.4, we see also in these contrasting examples how a focus on conditionality can result in a minimising of expectations; the emphasis is on what claimants need to do to be seen to be looking for work, rather than on how they might maximise their chances of obtaining work. By contrast, when focusing on the job itself, advisers talk through the steps needed for success (such as obtaining an appropriate CV).

3.5.4 Effective practice

Effective practice in conducting a job search consists of:

- discussing vacancies in ways that are tailored to claimants' circumstances;
- explaining and highlighting ways in which the vacancies might suit the claimant;
- using the job search as an opportunity to provide guidance on making a successful application (rather than simply informing claimants about eligibility for benefit).

3.6 Variations in explaining conditionality

Key points

- Advisers' approaches to explaining the conditions of claiming JSA varied substantially: from very minimal to more 'heavy-handed'.
- This variability seems to be related, in part, to claimants' variable circumstances.
- But some variability (e.g. in whether claimants are granted a 'permitted period') seems to be independent of their qualifications or job goals.
- Although a key theme of this chapter has been that effective practice involves an emphasis on work rather than conditionality, advisers do also need to talk explicitly about the conditions of claiming JSA.
- One option is to separate out the task of explaining what claimants have to do to claim JSA from the tasks related to supporting them back into work.

3.6.1 Explaining the conditions of claiming JSA

Advisers' approaches to explaining the conditions of claiming JSA varied substantially. At one extreme was a minimalist approach, with very little emphasis on the 'rules and regulations'. For example, the following extract shows everything that was said in this interview relating to conditionality. There is no explanation about how the claimant should be available for and actively seeking work, and no discussion about what steps he ought to take to find work or how often he ought to take them. The adviser simply draws the claimant's attention to the 'rules and regulations' in his signing book, and advises him to keep a record of his job search in whatever way he wants (he can use the relevant Jobcentre Plus form if he wants, line 14).

Extract 3.30 [118] NJI 25+ (Oct 07)

1 PA: Still have to come in every two weeks to sign on.
 2 Cla: Yeah.
 3 PA: Um you've got one of the days at two-twenty-five. Er first
 4 one's next Wednesday, the seventh, and then two weeks later
 5 on the twenty-first. Er every fortnight Wednesday at two-
 6 twenty-five. OK. Um signing book you bring with you, it's
 7 got your rules, regulations, things like that in there.
 8 Cla: Yeah.
 9 PA: And the follow-up bit you fill out if you want to stop your
 10 claim, so if you start work or go abroad.
 ((lines omitted during which the claimant explains that he had agency work
 but lost that without any notice))
 11 PA: Um ((pause)) you have to keep a record of what you've been
 12 doing to look for work.
 13 Cla: Yeah.
 14 PA: a:nd use this if [you want-
 15 Cla: [Well I've already took- I was looking at
 16 the: took a printout (.) there's an electrician needed
 17 [(some)
 18 PA: [Oh right.
 19 Cla: So I'll give that a phone
 20 ((pause))
 21 PA: Excellent

At the other extreme, advisers sometimes spelled out the conditions explicitly, and treated them as non-negotiable. For example, in Extract 3.31 the adviser explains that the claimant will be expected to apply for all jobs in retail or office work, even though she does not really want to work in either area. She specifies what the claimant will be expected to do to look for work, and how often she should do it, explains that she **has** to use the Jobcentre Plus form for keeping a record of her job search, and ends by describing how the claimant could be sanctioned if she fails to meet these conditions.

Extract 3.31 [122] NJI 18-24 (Oct 07)

1 PA: So what sort of work, are you looking to go back into retail
2 again?
3 Cla: Not really, but that's what the lady like said on the phone.
4 PA: We'll have to start with that one on there.
5 Cla: Yeah.
6 PA: 'Cos that's where all your experience is.
7 Cla: Yeah.
8 PA: But you can look for other things as well. What other things
9 would you be interested in doing? What about office work?
10 Cla: Er yeah, can do.
11 PA: What do you want to do?
12 Cla: I'm not sure really, that's why, I came in to see someone
13 the other day on your, right at the end bench to talk about
14 all the jobs that you can do, which isn't, doesn't involve
15 mainly being in- indoors all the time. But we couldn't
16 really think of many like (...) what I could get straight
17 away obviously.
18 PA: Mm. Well what this does at the minute, this is what you
19 agree to look for, the sort of work um (...) that you would
20 (...) just put, sorry (...) um (...) be looking, we would
21 expect you to apply for all jobs that are retail or office.
22 Cla: Mm.
23 PA: What we ask you to do is to use our services twice a week,
24 so that means, do you have the Internet at home?
25 Cla: Yeah.
26 PA: It's by far the easiest, um is that you look on the Internet
27 twice a week and apply for any jobs that we've got that
28 you're interested in.
29 Cla: Yeah.
30 PA: There's a list of.
31 Cla: Yeah, got one of those at home.
32 PA: Got one of those already?
33 Cla: Yeah.
34 PA: And you have to fill this out, showing us what you've been
35 doing. So write down when you went on the Internet, all the
36 jobs you applied for when you looked in the paper, etc.
37 Cla: Yeah.
38 PA: Alright?
39 Cla: Okay.
40 PA: And we ask you, read this little booklet before you next
41 come in, so we, you know that, everything that you need to
42 know. As and when you get a job, you tear that bit out.
43 Cla: Yeah.
44 PA: And um send it back to us, to make sure we pay your benefit
45 up to date.
46 Cla: Mm hmm.
47 PA: Alright?
48 Cla: Yeah.
49 PA: So that's part of the conditions that we ask you to do to
50 get benefit, so you have to show us you're actively seeking
51 employment.
52 Cla: Yeah.
53 PA: So if you were to say there was a job come up, oh I don't
54 know, in ((shop name)) and you said "I don't want to do
55 that" and you didn't apply, we would be able to stop your
56 benefit if we thought that there was no other reason that
57 you couldn't do the job.
58 Cla: Yeah.

This variability seems to be related, in part, to claimants' variable circumstances. For example, the adviser from Extract 3.31, took a different approach to conditionality in other interviews, minimising the requirements for some claimants. An example of this is Extract 3.16, where she explains the 'rules and regulations' in strikingly weakened terms compared to Extract 3.31 (*all it's asking you to do ... don't worry about it being a huge monologue of every time you've done anything...Apply for two jobs a week, that's only if they're available in your field, so don't worry about that*). The claimants' circumstances are very different: in Extract 3.31, the claimant is in her 20s with minimal work experience and qualifications; in Extract 3.16, the claimant is in his 50s with specialist qualifications (in transport management). However, claimant differences do not explain all the variability in how advisers approach conditionality, as the examples in the following section demonstrate.

3.6.2 Permitted period

In the great majority of cases we recorded, advisers asked claimants for two further jobs goals after eliciting their primary one. Only occasionally did they grant claimants a 'permitted period' – an opportunity to focus on just the one goal for 13 weeks. This supports findings from a previous interview study, in which advisers reported preferring *'not to use permitted periods unless customers had a set of specialised skills in high demand and were likely to find work very quickly'* (Davis et al., 2007: 33). Like that study, however, we also found variation in advisers' use of permitted periods that does not appear to be related to claimants' circumstances.

The following two extracts provide an illustration. In both, the claimants have recently completed degree-level training for their career goal: to be a photographer (Extract 3.32) and a graphic designer/photographer (Extract 3.33). In the first example, the adviser has done a brief job search, which has drawn a blank for photographers. Nevertheless, he tells the claimant that he will not ask him for further job goals for the JSAG.

Extract 3.32 [102] NJI 18-24 (Oct 07)

- 1 PA: Okay, um what we'll do is, because you've recently
 2 qualified etc, we'll give you er what's called a permitted
 3 period, which means for thirteen weeks er all you have to do
 4 is look for photography work, we're not going to ask you to
 5 look for anything else.
 6 Cla: Okay.
 7 PA: Er if after thirteen weeks you still haven't found anything,
 8 we'll ask you to come back and we'll look at other things
 9 you could possibly do.
 10 Cla: Hopefully it won't be that long.

However, in the second case, which is exactly comparable to the first, the adviser is insistent on the claimant choosing two more job goals, which are unrelated to his qualifications. Indeed, the adviser pursues the option of retail work despite the claimant having responded with non-committal silence and hesitancy to the extent that the adviser says: *you don't look entirely convinced about what I'm saying*.

Extract 3.33 [067] 18-24 (Aug 07)

1 PA: What we're talking about is the things we put down in your
 2 job goal.
 3 Cla: Yeah
 4 PA: Yeah
 5 (.)
 6 PA: .hhh (0.2) Much mo::re likelihood of getting a job in a
 7 sho::p, (.) than there is in a local gallery.
 8 (0.4)
 9 Cla: Y[eah
 10 PA: [Yeah?
 11 (.)
 12 PA: Can you see where I'm coming from,
 13 Cla: .tch (.) yeah
 14 PA: Yeh
 15 (.)
 16 PA: And I'm- I do: fully understand. (.) You've worked hard to
 17 get into graphic design and photography and that's what
 18 you wanna do (.) and great you're continuing looking for
 19 that .hh but in the meantime (.) we have to think of
 20 something (.)#uh#
 21 Cla: Sure yea[h
 22 PA: [along a different line

It is difficult to see how the two cases differ; the variability in practice here does not appear to be related to the claimants' circumstances (for instance, both are looking for similar kinds of work, have similar qualifications, and are recently qualified). Allowing the claimant a permitted period contributes to the greater cooperativeness between adviser and claimant in Extract 3.32, than in Extract 3.33 – the cooperativeness in 3.32 is not transparent in the short excerpt above; it is only discernible from reviewing the entire WFI.

3.6.3 A middle ground?

A key theme of this chapter has been the balance, and tensions, between explaining conditionality and focusing on work (i.e. considering fully the kinds of job goals which best fit the claimant's aptitudes and qualifications, and encouraging claimants to be proactive in searching for work). Advisers have, of course, to explain the conditionality of claiming JSA; not to do so runs the risk of ill-informed claimants breaching those conditions unintentionally. There is not enough evidence in our recordings to determine the extent to which claimants grasped what was expected of them. However, it is worth noting that even after we had reviewed 42 cases we were still unsure of exactly what was required for a claimant to avoid sanction (e.g. whether claimants could be liable to sanction if they failed to apply for a job to which the adviser had 'submitted' them). At the same time, there is good evidence – emphasised throughout this chapter – that a focus on conditionality when conducting many of the core tasks of the NJI tends to result in advisers minimising what claimants should do to look for work.

One possible solution is for advisers to separate out the task of explaining the conditions of JSA from the tasks related to supporting claimants back into work. For example, they might take a work-focused approach to talking job goals, steps towards work, and the job search, but then provide an explicit explanation of conditionality later in the interview; a logical opportunity to do so arises at the point when claimants are asked to sign the JSAG.

3.7 Conclusion

The findings reported here reflect advisers' dual role in administering the benefits system and advising claimants about looking for work. Whilst this latter role cannot be that of a careers guidance adviser, nevertheless advisers were sometimes able to encourage claimants to think constructively (and aspirationally) about their future employment and careers. Broadly speaking, two different approaches are to be found in NJIs. Advisers may take a more process-driven (fill-in-the-boxes) approach focusing primarily on the conditionality of benefit; or they may balance that (conditionality) with a more claimant-focused (personalised) approach.²⁰ There is perhaps a tension between whether advisers' primary goal is to move people off benefit as quickly as possible, or to assist them in finding work that fits their aspirations. Assessing the compatibility of these goals, and whether the latter is consistent with the longer-term objective of helping claimants **stay** in work, is beyond the scope of this research. However, some of the findings reported here may help the DWP in clarifying the role of the adviser.

There is some evidence that difficulties in the WFI interactions (difficulties summarised in Section 3.3.6) are more frequently associated with a process-driven 'tick the boxes' approach, when that results in claimants not given the opportunity to discuss fully their previous work experience, their training, their aptitudes and aspirations; and – if they have agreed job goals in a previous benefits claim or have worked before – whether they wish to continue those same goals or in the same line of work. More open enquiries about claimants' work experiences and aspirations/preferences, and a more cautious approach to the (lack of) realism of job goals (for instance checking whether the claimant has had any success so far in looking for a certain kind of work, or has any leads), helps to avoid such problems as disentangling explaining the conditionality of the JSAG from appropriate guidance about looking for work job goals; failing to match a claimant's experience and training; evident claimant dissatisfaction with, and lack of commitment to, the job goals that are emerging; variations in instructions given to claimants; and misjudgements on the part of PAs about whether a job goal is 'realistic', in the local market conditions.

²⁰ The latter approach, which is more supportive and encouraging, may be particularly appropriate for JSA 18-24 claimants, who may have limited experience of the job market, and little idea about their potential in that market (for a more detailed analysis of age-related differences in WFIs, see Irvine *et al.*, 2010).

Moreover, when PAs adhere too rigidly to a process-driven focus on conditionality, especially what 'needs to be done' to satisfy the conditions of benefit, the tendency is to treat the minimum that needs to be done as **all** that a claimant need do, thereby encouraging claimants to do no more than the minimum to look for work. This runs the risk of demotivating claimants, and fostering a culture in which they focus on doing only what is necessary to get benefit, rather than doing what is necessary to find work. Thus, focusing too closely on conditionality can result in a failure to persuade claimants to be proactive in searching for work, to do as much as they can and connect with as many agencies and programmes as they can in order to find work. In addition, doing a job search with the claimant helps to individualise advice about what jobs might be relevant, and provides an opportunity to involve the claimant in collaboratively learning how to search for work on Jobcentre Plus's system. Effective practice involves, then, going beyond a focus on what is required to obtain benefit; it involves empowering claimants to be proactive in searching for the kind of work to which they are likely to feel committed.

4 Initial Work Focused Interviews with Incapacity Benefit claimants in Pathways to Work areas

4.1 Background to Pathways to Work and the initial incapacity benefits Work Focused Interview

This chapter focuses on initial Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) with incapacity benefits claimants, all conducted in Jobcentre Plus offices offering the Pathways to Work programme.²¹ Claimants are eligible for the Pathways to Work programme if they are entitled to Incapacity Benefit (IB); Income Support (IS) on the grounds of incapacity; IS whilst appealing against a decision that they are not incapable of work; or Severe Disability Allowance. The Pathways programme has been central to the Government's aim of reducing the numbers of claimants remaining on incapacity benefits by providing information, help and support in preparing and entering paid work. The key components of Pathways (as it has been implemented in Jobcentre Plus offices included in the present sample) are:

- an initial **mandatory** WFI with a specialist Incapacity Benefits Personal Adviser (IBPA). At the time of recording (between July 2007 and January 2008), advisers used a 'screening tool'²² at this interview to establish whether or not the claimant would be required to attend a series of up to five further mandatory WFIs at approximately one-month intervals;

²¹ The data collection for this project took place before the replacement of Incapacity Benefit with Employment and Support Allowance in October 2008.

²² The use of the screening tool was discontinued after October 2008.

- a range of **optional** practical and financial support measures termed the **Choices** package. Some elements of Choices draw on existing initiatives aimed at supporting people with illness or disability in preparation and entry to work and some have been designed specifically for the Pathways programme.

These initial interviews with incapacity benefits claimants are comparable to those reviewed in the previous chapter, in so far as they are a mandatory part of making a new claim. However, while New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) take place before the claim begins, initial incapacity benefits WFIs are held as soon as possible after the end of the eighth week into a claim, usually in week nine²³ – the interview usually having been arranged over the telephone. The conditions of claiming incapacity benefits are also markedly different to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Aimed at those who are unable to work (at least temporarily) due to ill health, no conditionality is attached other than the requirement to attend the initial WFI (a requirement introduced for certain claimants under the Pathways regulations). Pathways to Work was introduced in several pilot areas in 2003 and has been steadily expanded, with full national coverage completed by June 2008.

The data collection for this study took place before the replacement of Incapacity Benefit with ESA in October 2008. Since then, the use of the screening tool to assess eligibility for the Pathways Programme has been discontinued. We should emphasise, though, that despite such changes, and the screening tool no longer being part of initial WFIs for this claimant group, our observations about certain communicational tasks and difficulties, and our recommendations for effective practice in overcoming those difficulties, will continue to be relevant. These difficulties apply more widely, so that even if procedures change, advisers have nevertheless to manage many of the same communicational tasks (e.g. explaining the differences between the mandatory and voluntary aspects of a programme); our recommendations apply therefore to these wider communicational tasks.

In this chapter we focus on the following key aspects of the incapacity benefits WFIs in our dataset:

- introducing and explaining Pathways to Work and the WFI regime;
- references to the screening tool during the WFI;
- the way in which advisers convey the outcome of the screening process;
- how advisers introduce, and pursue, the question of work with claimants;
- information about relevant programmes and service providers (e.g. condition management).

²³ Currently (October 2009) amended Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) regulations apply, which are less specific about the precise time at which the initial interview should be held.

4.2 Overview of the incapacity benefits sample

The findings reported in this chapter are based on recordings of 20 initial WFIs conducted by seven advisers, with claimants who were all in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB); two claimants in the sample additionally received IS. Table 4.1 shows a breakdown of the characteristics of this sample. All these recordings are of the **first** WFI the claimant had attended after making a new IB claim. However, as the table shows, over half the sample (13 claimants) had some previous experience of making a benefits claim: six had made another claim to IB, six had claimed JSA, and one had claimed IS (as a lone parent). Only one of the claimants had seen the same adviser in the past; she had attended interviews, on a voluntary basis, three years before. In one exceptional case, the claimant had been on IB for some time but had never previously been seen by an adviser; the interview was therefore conducted as if it were an initial WFI.

As the table shows, half the claimants were 'screened in' to the Pathways programme, and hence were mandated to attend further WFIs. In three cases, claimants were recruited to the NHS Condition Management programme; and to the Work Preparation programme, in one case. For those who were not screened into Pathways, there would be no further mandatory requirement to meet with an adviser again for periods of up to three years (these arrangements have been the subject of recent changes, including changes to the WFI review period; the arrangements outlined here are those that were in place during the period of data collection, from July 2007 until January 2008). However, voluntary participation in Pathways was available to all IB claimants in Pilot areas; such voluntary participation was mentioned, and offered, to some claimants who had been screened out.

Because all those claimants included in our sample received one of the incapacity benefits noted above, i.e. IB, and only two additionally received IS (in both cases very small amounts), we will refer to IB claimants, rather than to claimants receiving incapacity benefits. Our observations and findings are restricted therefore to IB initial WFIs with IB claimants (they are not based on, and so may not apply to, interviews with claimants receiving IS, IS whilst appealing against a decision that they are not incapable of work, or Severe Disability Allowance).

Table 4.1 Characteristics of the incapacity benefits sample

| Characteristic | Number of claimants |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Gender | |
| Female | 13 |
| Male | 7 |
| Age | |
| Teens | 1 |
| 20s | 2 |
| 30s | 2 |
| 40s | 8 |
| 50s | 7 |
| Ethnicity | |
| White British | 20 |
| Previous claims? | |
| Yes | 13 |
| No | 7 |
| Time on current benefit | |
| 0-3 months | 16 |
| 6 months | 3 |
| 3 years 2 months ¹ | 1 |
| Pathways screening outcome | |
| Screened in | 10 |
| Screened out | 7 |
| Uncertain/pending | 3 |

¹ This was actually a three-year trigger appointment but was treated as an initial interview because this claimant had not been seen for a WFI before.

Table 4.2 Length of initial incapacity benefits WFIs

| 0-15 minutes | 16-30 minutes | 31-45 minutes | >45 minutes | Range |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 14-57 minutes |

As Table 4.1 shows, over half the sample (13 claimants) had some previous experience of making a benefits claim: six had made another claim to IB, six had claimed JSA, and one had claimed IS (as a lone parent). There does not appear to be an association between length of an initial WFI and whether or not a claimant had previous experience of making a claim (some of the shortest interviews were conducted with those who had no prior experience and some of the longest with those who had made a claim before). Only one of the claimants had previously seen the same adviser.

Our sample of 20 WFIs is comparatively small (for instance we recorded seven of the 300 specialist IBPAs in Jobcentre Plus-led areas across the country); therefore

the cases and examples shown here may not be typical or representative of the approach of all IBPAs. However, the principal aim of this study has been to identify **what works best** – to identify effective practice in WFIs by comparing the different verbal techniques PAs use, and identifying which of these is most likely to result in claimants taking steps or otherwise being moved closer towards work, **during the interview itself**. For this purpose, how extensive is the tendency for PAs to miss opportunities to encourage claimants to consider possible steps towards work cannot perhaps be generalised from our sample. What we can say, though, is that PAs **do** sometimes miss such opportunities, even when it is clear that a claimant is interested in re-training or other steps they might take; and we show **when and how** they miss such opportunities, and what they might do to avoid missed opportunities. The issues we are addressing, therefore, are not so much how frequently PAs miss opportunities, but what in their approach contributes to missed opportunities (when they are missed), and how this can be remedied. Of course there are other issues addressed here, such as claimants not understanding the purpose of the interview, which are subject to a caveat about generalisability; though we should emphasise that when we have presented these findings to stakeholders, they have recognised the picture we draw of IB WFIs as essentially valid.

4.3 Introducing the initial WFI and Pathways to Work

Key points

- IB claimants are often unclear as to why they have been asked to come to an initial WFI.
- IBPAs have to convey a large amount of complex information regarding the various aspects of Pathways during the initial WFI.
- IBPAs' explanations of Pathways during the initial WFI were, at the time of recording, complicated by the fact that they did not know yet whether or not the claimant would be 'screened in'.
- Thus, IBPAs often encountered difficulties in explaining the purpose, components and combination of mandatory and voluntary elements of the programme, making them less effective in reassuring claimants that the WFI was appropriate to them and their circumstances.
- In light of this, three principles for best practice in giving initial explanations are recommended: **simplicity, staging and tailoring**.

4.3.1 Explaining the purpose of the initial interview

The Pathways to Work programme represents a significant change to the conditions and requirements of incapacity benefits receipt; attending a mandatory meeting at Jobcentre Plus, where the focus of discussion will be work-related, may be new to many IB claimants.

This section considers how IBPAs introduce the Pathways programme, and explain the purpose of the initial WFI, to IB claimants.

Incapacity Benefit claimants receive a letter inviting them to attend a mandatory Pathways interview eight weeks into their benefits claim. This letter explains the purpose of the interview. The letter should be followed up by a telephone call, in which the IBPA further explains the purpose of the forthcoming interview (in only about a third of our cases did the PAs refer explicitly to having phoned the claimant before the WFI; in cases in which such a call was not mentioned, it is not possible to say whether a call was or was not made). At the initial IBWFI, IBPAs almost always begin, after introducing themselves, by (again) explaining the purpose of the interview. Later in the interview, they give more extended explanations of what is available through the Pathways programme.

Despite having received information by letter and (possibly) a phone call, it is evident that in many cases IB claimants in the study sample did not understand the purpose of the interview, or why they had been asked to attend for interview. This was particularly apparent in cases when claimants were asked directly by IBPAs if they understood the reason for the interview, e.g. *has it been explained why I've asked you to come in o::r have you just had a letter* [149], *do you understand why we've asked you to come in* [157]. None of the claimants in our sample claimed to know why they were there. In one way or another, they expressed having received **just the letter**, not knowing why, thinking a mistake had been made, being mystified at being asked to come for an interview, and so forth.

The explanations IBPAs give about the purpose of the interview are important because they are the first opportunity to get the claimant 'on board'. This is the point at which IBPAs may allay claimants' concerns about why they are there. Claimants may be apprehensive that their benefits are at risk and may be withdrawn²⁴, or they may think that the Pathways WFI is not appropriate for them, either because they are still under a contract of employment or because they believe they should not have to attend the Jobcentre while 'on the sick' (the expression sometimes used by claimants, as in Extract 4.1).

IBPAs typically began by explaining the purpose of the interview, regardless of whether or not they had initially asked claimants if they knew **why they had been called in today**. This explanation served, in part, as a way to establish the agenda for the interview and typically included one or more of the following points:

- that 'help and support' is available to the claimant through Pathways;
- that claimants may be asked to attend a series of Pathways interviews after this initial WFI;
- which parts of the Pathways programme are mandatory and which are voluntary;

²⁴ See also the evidence that IB claimants may be anxious that they have been 'called in' because their benefits are at risk (Corden and Nice, 2006).

- the nature and purpose of Pathways more generally.

However, there is evidence that IBPAs were not always successful in explaining the purpose of the initial interview. Their explanations were not always effective in helping claimants to understand why they were there. For example, immediately after the IBPA's introductory explanation in recording [081] about the purpose of the interview, it is evident that the claimant has not understood the explanation, and hence the reasons for his visit (see lines 24-28 in the following excerpt).

Extract 4.1 [081] IB Pathways initial (Oct 07)

1 IBPA: So just to explain to you why: (0.4) we've asked you to
 2 come in toda::y. .Hhhh u::m it's basically: (.) anybody
 3 who's in receipt of Incapacity Benefit no::w .hhh we
 4 bring them in .hh u::m .hh to see if there's anything we
 5 can do to help you get back to work
 6 (0.2)
 7 IBPA: Um it's:: a- a- programme that the government brought out
 8 o:h a couple of years ago no:w .hhh aimed at everybody on
 9 (.) in receipt of: Incapacity Benefit .hh u::m .hh if
 10 you're sort of ready to get back to work the:n obviously
 11 we'll try and assist you in every way we
 12 ca[n to do: tha:t.hh but if::
 13 Cla: [Yeah
 14 IBPA: work's a long way o:ff which for m- quite a lot of our
 15 claimants it i::s .hhh then obviously we're looking to
 16 see if there's anything else that we can do to help.
 17 (0.4)
 18 IBPA: Is that oka:y,=
 19 Cla: =Yeah
 20 (0.4)
 21 IBPA: Is there anything you [wanna ask me or are you okay with that?
 22 Cla: [(fine)
 23 (0.2)
 24 Cla: .hhh So- (0.6) what- (.) actually is this interview about
 25 IBPA: [It's:
 26 Cla: [is it-
 27 (0.2)
 28 Cla: 'Cos: like I said I'm on the sick now aren't I so-

In other interviews, IBPAs' explanations are apparently unclear, and may not be effective in reassuring claimants that attending a WFI was appropriate to them and their circumstances.

Some particular areas of difficulty that have emerged are explored in the next section.

4.3.2 Difficulties in explaining Pathways WFIs

It is evident that advisers encounter two principal difficulties when explaining to claimants the purpose of these initial interviews:

- explaining the distinction between mandatory and voluntary aspects of Pathways;
- explaining how many interviews the claimant may be required to attend.

These difficulties arise largely because of the timing of the explanations: as the first main topic of the interview, the explanations are given at a point when the IBPAs do not yet know whether the claimant will indeed be screened in for subsequent mandatory WFI.

Extract 4.2 illustrates how this lack of knowledge can lead to a rather confused and contradictory explanation. The IBPA begins by explaining that the main reason for the interview is to **look at getting you back into work** (line 12). However, she is subsequently careful to emphasise that the claimant will not be mandated to do anything other than (possibly) attend some further interviews: she explains twice that the only mandatory part of the programme is that the claimant attends his interviews (lines 15-16; 26-27). The difficulties emerge when the IBPA then tries to explain that all other aspects of the programme are voluntary.

Extract 4.2 [013] IB Pathways initial (July 07)

This transcript begins 12 seconds into the interview, immediately after a short joking exchange about being on camera.

1 IBPA: I'd a (0.3) brief word with you I think the
 2 other day a[s to why you were here
 3 Cla: [Yeah
 4 (.)
 5 Cla: Mhm=
 6 IBPA: =Er:m: (.) basically because you're claiming
 7 Incapacity Benefit .hh we need to erm look and
 8 see if there's any help or support we can give
 9 you
 10 (.)
 11 Cla: [Mhm
 12 IBPA: [.hhh to look at getting you back into work
 13 (0.5)
 14 IBPA: So: (0.2) that's the main reason why you've come

((15 lines omitted during which the IBPA tells the claimant he's free to ask questions throughout the interview))

15 IBPA: .hhh Ehm (1.7) the only mandatory part of this is that
 16 you come here
 17 (0.2)
 18 Cla: [Mhm
 19 IBPA: [Cause I know you've been on New Deal before so
 20 you [know that
 21 Cla: [Yeah
 22 IBPA: .hh [there's a lot of mandatory parts [of New Deal
 23 Cla: [Yeah I know [Yeah
 24 IBPA: .hh there isn't (0.3) here
 25 (0.3)
 26 IBPA: The o- as I say the only mandatory part is that
 27 you actually turn up for your in[terviews .hhh
 28 Cla: [Yeah

29 IBPA: it can be anything up to six interviews .hh er:m::
30 (0.7) and again (0.2) whatever whichever one you come to
31 (0.4)
32 Cla: M[hm
33 IBPA: [they'll always be voluntary .hh I can th- like
34 throw ideas to (0.3)
35 Cla: Yeah
36 IBPA: your way (0.4) but it's entirely up to you

The key problem is that, not yet knowing whether the claimant will be screened in or out, the IBPA finds herself having to explain **both** that the number of interviews the claimant will be required to attend is not yet fixed, **and** that no matter how many he has to attend, participation in the WFI is all that will be required. Trying to deal with both points at once, the explanation becomes confused (see her self-corrections and other indications of hesitancy, such as the extended *er:m::* at line 29 and the many pauses) and contradictory (saying first that the interviews are **mandatory** and then that **they'll always be voluntary**).

This is a particularly transparent case of the difficulties associated with attempting to explain, simultaneously, multiple aspects of the Pathways programmes, at the beginning of the interview, before the screening outcome is known.

4.3.3 Simplifying introductions to Pathways

As the above discussion has shown, IBPAs in the sample recordings typically dealt with a large amount of complex information in their introductory explanations. It was common for them to try to convey, in a very short amount of time, that:

- Pathways offers help both with getting back to work and with managing the claimant's condition;
- Pathways involves some mandatory and some voluntary aspects;
- the claimant may or may not be called in for further interviews.

Each of these is complex in its own right. They demand a careful 'balancing act': on the one hand, introducing the work focus and the requirements of Pathways, and on the other avoiding the implication that Pathways is aimed at 'forcing' people back to work.

In light of these difficulties, some consideration might be given to simplifying the introductory explanation of the purpose of the interview and to deferring explanation of the subsequent mandatory and voluntary aspects of Pathways until later in the interview, when the screening result is known.

The screening tool, as a means to screen claimants for possible admission to the Pathways programme and subsequent interviews, was withdrawn in October 2008, after we had completed recording incapacity benefits WFIs. Nevertheless, drawing on the above findings, three principles might nevertheless be considered in explaining the purpose of the interview and the Pathways programme:

- **simplicity** – it can be useful to separate out multiple, complex explanations;
- **staging** – it is not necessary to provide a full explanation of all aspects of Pathways at the start of the interview. Different pieces of information can be given at different stages, when they become relevant;
- **tailoring** – where possible provide an explanation that fits the claimant's circumstances.

Simplicity, staging and tailoring are all evident in some instances of IBPAs' initial explanations. Extract 4.3 provides a good example: the IBPA provides a single initial explanation of Pathways (lines 1-9) and avoids any mention of what may or may not happen after this interview until she has obtained further information about the claimant's circumstances (lines 13-15). The explanation is also tailored to the individual claimant in that the IBPA designs it to inform the claimant about the differences between his experience of being on IB in a non-pathways area, and what is on offer here.

Extract 4.3 [116] IB Pathways initial (Oct 07)

This transcript begins 56 seconds into the interview after the IBPA has confirmed that the claimant has recently moved from another part of the country and that she has the correct contact details for him.

1 IBPA: U::m (0.3) .H (1.0) we:'re (0.3) i:n this area we-
 2 (0.1) we:'re known as a Pathways to Wo::rk area
 3 (0.2)
 4 Cla: Y:eah
 5 IBPA: a::nd (0.2) I don't think it wa:s whe:::re you:
 6 were living befo::re .hhh and there a:re (0.2) u::m
 7 (0.2) tch (0.5) opportunities avai:lable to people
 8 living here (who're) on Benefi::t that w- I need to
 9 tell you abou::t
 10 Cla: Okay
 11 (0.1)
 12 IBPA: ba:sically that's °why I want you to come i::n bu:t°
 13 (0.2) .hh but what I'd like to do start off wi::th
 14 i:s: u:m (1.2) ju::s:t find out a bit about
 15 yourse::lf oka:y
 16 (0.2)
 17 Cla: Yup

Furthermore, with only a slight difference in wording, the IBPA whose difficulties were illustrated in Extract 4.2 is similarly able to provide a more simple explanation of two key aspects of Pathways (work focus and other forms of support) more effectively in an interview with a different claimant:

And we look to see: if there's any help or support we can give you .h ehm either .h (0.2) managing your condition .hh or: (0.4) and or getting you back into work [014].

A key difficulty for IBPAs in giving these early explanations appears to be **trying to do too much too soon**: explain the Pathways programme generally and the reason for the initial WFI in particular, explain about (potential) future WFIs and the distinction between mandatory and voluntary components – and all this without the benefit of knowing the screening outcome. By simplifying, staging and tailoring their explanations, IBPAs may be able to avoid some of the difficulties outlined above.

4.4 The screening tool: making its presence felt?

Key points

- In several cases, IBPAs made reference to the screening process, either with explicit reference to the screening tool or by implicit indication that a screening process was being implemented.
- In contrast, some IBPAs asked information gathering questions without reference to, or naming of, the process.
- The first of these two strategies – explicit or implicit reference to a ‘tool’ of some kind – establishes some distance between the IBPA and the screening process. Previous research has shown that such approaches indicate awkwardness, delicacy or defensiveness.

4.4.1 References to the screening tool

During initial WFIs, IBPAs completed a computer-based ‘screening tool’ through which to establish whether or not the claimant was required to attend further mandatory WFIs.²⁵ In most of the interviews in the recorded sample, IBPAs referred to the screening tool in conversation with claimants, when for instance explaining the information-gathering process used to determine whether the claimant was to be asked to attend for further interviews. The screening tool was referred to either explicitly (*I’m just (.) gonna use what we call the screening tool*) or more implicitly (*So wha(h)(h)t I’m gonna do first of all just a quick questionnaire I need to fill in; just gather a bit more information um just for the system that we use; it’s asking me...*).

In contrast, some IBPAs simply began asking information-gathering questions without reference to or naming the process (e.g. *What I’d like to do start off wi::th i:s: u:m (1.2) ju::s:t find out a bit about yourse::lf oka:y* [116]).

There is, therefore, a contrast between **process-led** explanations, in which IBPAs refer to the information gathering process and instruments, and **claimant-focused** explanations of gathering information about an individual.

²⁵ Again, to emphasise, the screening tool was no longer used from October 2008, after we had completed recording IBWFIs.

4.4.2 The screening tool and distancing from claimants

Evidence from previous studies of situations in which professionals have the option of selecting between ‘formats’ – either referring to the process (e.g. referring to or reading from a document), or asking questions/delivering news directly – is that the process-led format is associated with the professional distancing themselves from what is being asked or told (see e.g. Allistone, 2002; and Boyd, 1998). By doing so, the professional indicates that there is something awkward or ‘negative’ about what is to be asked/told.

Thus, when IBPAs implicitly or explicitly refer to the screening tool process, they imply that it is not they, personally, who require this information; rather, it is part of a bureaucratic process they are obliged to undertake. This introduces a defensiveness into both the information gathering, and the announcement of the screening outcome:

.hhh (0.2) Right .hh it has actually said that under Pathways while ever you're in receipt of Incapacity Benefit you will need to come in for further in:terviews: [036].

The defensiveness associated with the distancing in references to the screening tool risks implying that the screening tool – and its outcome – is ‘bad news’ as described further in the next section.

4.5 Mandatory WFIs: ‘bad news’ or opportunity?

Key points

- IBPAs frequently represent the mandatory nature of subsequent interviews as claimants **needing** to attend.
- The Pathways programme is therefore often represented in negative terms, using a ‘language of imposition’ – as though subsequent interviews are being imposed as a penalty.
- Some IBPAs use an alternative formulation of the news that the claimant has been screened in, presenting this as offering the claimant a chance to receive further help and support – using the ‘language of opportunity’.

4.5.1 Explaining the mandatory aspects of Pathways WFIs: the language of imposition

There is evidence that part of IBPAs’ difficulty reflects their unease in handling the balance between the mandatory requirement to attend WFIs, and IBPAs’ attempts to assure claimants that their purpose is to support, rather than pressure, them back into work (always with the caveat, ‘if that is appropriate’), as is illustrated in this example:

.hhh We're not he:re to pressurise you to do anything. .hh It's not like any of the other (.).t Jobcentre Plus programmes that you may have come across if you've ever been on Jobseeker's Allowance:: .hhhh Um everything that we: can offer people is voluntary .hhh so there's no pressure (0.2) apart from just attending the interviews really [081].

The IBPA's manifest concern here is to emphasise that her purpose is not to put any pressure on the claimant. This reflects the findings of previous research, which found that IBPAs perceive a potential conflict between the need to build a good relationship with claimants and their authority to impose a benefit sanction if claimants failed to attend the interviews (Dickens *et al.*, 2004). Advisers felt this sent mixed messages to claimants, which could be counter-productive.

This balancing act has a striking consequence: that their being 'screened in' to Pathways, and so to attend a series of subsequent interviews, is announced to claimants in terms which suggest this is 'bad news' from the claimant's point of view.

In the sample recordings, IBPAs often use the terms '*have to*' or '*need to*' in explaining claimants' attendance at further WFIs. **Having** or **needing** to attend subsequent interviews, which are often described explicitly as **mandatory**, being **called** or **brought in** or **put on a list**, or **need to come to six** it's a maximum of six – all the phrases imply that the interviews are something negative for the claimant, something imposed on them, a penalty of sorts. By contrast the use of the minimising **just** portrays the single interview as the best potential outcome of the screening tool, and that any additional interviews are likely to be unwanted from the claimant's perspective.

So generally, explanations about initial and subsequent Pathways WFIs were couched in the language of imposition (**have to**, **need**), detracting from a culture of the positive value of work, and how these interviews can contribute in offering claimants assistance and support in returning to work. IBPAs often did not emphasise – at least, in their opening explanations – the real opportunities Pathways offered. IBPAs did not 'sell' Pathways, rather they conveyed, for instance when announcing the screening result, that Pathways was something of a 'penalty' rather than an opportunity.

Many of these difficulties IBPAs have in explaining the differences between the mandatory and the voluntary aspects of Pathways, and how these difficulties seem to be compounded by the amount of information they attempt to include in the opening explanations, are illustrated in Extract 4.4.

Extract 4.4 [155] IB Pathways initial (Jan 08)

1 IBPA: Well the difference- I'll just explain what the
 2 difference is and then we can have a chat about ho:w
 3 you're doing (0.7) tch what happened sort o' last
 4 year is (0.3) (city name) was covered by what we
 5 call Pathways to work .hh similar to the support
 6 that we've gave you (0.2) volunta[ry befo::re .hHh
 7 Cla: [yea::h
 8 IBPA: but now whenever you make a clai:m (0.2) about eight
 9 weeks into your claim it's mandatory that you come
 10 in and [see us so you have to
 11 Cla: [yea::h
 12 IBPA: have a chat with u::s .hH the support on offer is
 13 there for to he::lp but it's (.) voluntary (0.3)
 14 Cla: Yeah
 15 IBPA: .hh so you might have to come in for more regular
 16 interv[iew]s this ti::me .hhh but .hh like before
 17 Cla: [.hh That's fine
 18 IBPA: really we- (0.2) we're here to try and help you::

The difficulties experienced by the adviser are evident in some disfluencies in her talk (e.g. lines 1, 6, 13), and the sheer density of explanation about what is voluntary and what is mandatory (eg. lines 6, 9 and 13), all set in shifting temporal contexts (i.e. the situation when the claimant claimed IB previously, what is offered now, and back to before).

4.6 Introducing the question of work

Key points

- During initial WFIs, IBPAs invariably ask claimants about their intentions to return to work.
- These enquiries sometimes lead to fruitful discussion of a claimant's thoughts and plans for work. More direct enquiries presupposing the claimant will be going back to work (e.g. *When do you think...*) are especially likely to open up work-focused discussion.
- However IBPAs' attempts to focus on claimants' plans or intentions to return to work are frequently deflected by claimants, who take these enquiries as further opportunities to elaborate on their medical conditions or other complaints as barriers to work.
- Therefore, a key challenge to address is that current strategies for enquiring about return to work – designed, in part, to unearth claimants' barriers to work – seem instead to consolidate claimants' belief that they are indeed unable to work.

4.6.1 Asking claimants about their plans to return to work

There is very limited past evidence regarding how frequently 'return to work' is discussed in initial IBWFIs. Previous studies for DWP have considered this matter in relation to Pathways WFIs generally, and have tended to treat the topic of 'return to work' along with a range of other work-related topics (Bailey *et al.*, 2007; Corden and Nice, 2006). Relying on claimant recall, these studies infer what was actually discussed in the WFI from what claimants report in interviews or questionnaires. This is problematic since there is some evidence that although *'thoughts about and plans for work'* was one of the key elements of initial Pathways interviews, some claimants *'did not remember talking much about work, but mainly about health circumstances and entitlement to benefits'* (Corden and Nice, 2006: para. 2.1.1).

In each of the 20 initial WFIs in the present sample, IBPAs introduced the question of whether and when the claimant anticipated working again. IBPAs always asked claimants about their intentions and plans to return to work. In some cases, the type of work the claimant thought might be possible or appropriate for them was also discussed; for instance some claimants intended to return to the same occupation and even position that they had had up to the time their medical condition prevented them working, whilst in others, they were interested in jobs in an area of work related to the one they have been forced to give up (for example, a claimant who is no longer able to work as a carpenter because of his medical condition, is keen to work in health and safety related to joinery).

IBPAs' enquiries about claimants' plans to return to work are important for the following reasons:

- responses about whether and when claimants intend to return to work are a factor in their recruitment to Pathways;
- they are one of the techniques through which IBPAs guide claimants to thinking about going back to work;
- they are central to the 'negotiability' of claimants' commitments to return to work.

Through their enquiries about claimants' plans to return to work, IBPAs were guiding or encouraging claimants in that direction, while being careful to emphasise that they were not in any sense requiring or putting any pressure on claimants to make plans for future employment. Nevertheless, the most effective enquiries about future work plans – in terms of opening up fruitful discussion about returning to work, and prompting the claimant to consider what work they might be able to do – were those framed in terms of a **presumption that claimants would be returning to work**.

When do you actually see yourself working again [013].

So in your opinion when do you think that you might be in a position to be thinking about getting back to work [081].

When would you look to be sort of going back to work [144].

So wha- when d'you think you'll be able to go back=have you any idea yet [113].

These are all examples of enquiries presupposing that claimants will return to work sometime; they all ask **when** that will be. The effectiveness of such enquiries, in contrast to more indirect or ambivalent ways of enquiring about future work plans, is well illustrated in these further excerpts from the WFI in Extract 4.4. The IBPA is attempting to get the claimant to commit to a plan to return to work in the future, attempts which the claimant has so far resisted. She resists once again when the adviser enquires in a more conditional form (lines 1-2).

Extract 4.5 [155] IB Pathways initial (Jan 08)

1 PA: so what- what are your plans no::w then are you wanting
 2 to get back to wo::rk are you wanting some treatme:nt
 3 or
 4 (0.4)
 5 Cla: I don't really kno::w (0.3) e:::rm
 6 (0.7)
 7 Cla: tch
 8 (2.1)
 9 Cla: I can't manage full time
 10 PA: no
 11 Cla: there's no: way I could [manage full time
 12 PA: [no:
 13 (2.2)
 14 PA: °°'kay°°
 15 (1.4)
 16 Cla: e:::rm so (0.4) I- I'm (1.5) I mi:::ght give the racing
 17 (0.2) go again (0.5) when summer comes but .hh
 .
 . ((153 lines omitted))
 .
 171 PA: no::w this question when would you like to see
 172 yourself wo:rking again
 173 (2.0)
 174 Cla: phhHHHhh.
 175 (3.6)
 176 Cla: depending on what sort of job it i:s
 177 PA: (°°mm°°)
 178 (0.3)
 179 PA: °°okay°°
 180 (0.4)
 181 PA: .hhh if we found you (0.2) your ideal job at your ideal
 182 hou:rs
 183 (0.7)
 184 PA: thinking about how you are day to da:y
 185 (0.8)
 186 PA: when would you like to thi:nk (0.2) I'll be back in
 187 work by:
 188 (2.7)
 189 Cla: I'd (like to) think I'll be back in work for Easter
 190 (0.9)

191 PA: oka:y
192 (0.4)
193 PA: so if I put within the next three mo:nth:s:

Having responded in a non-committal way to the IBPA's first enquiry in this excerpt, the claimant arrives at a tentative *I might give the racing a go again when the summer comes on*. But then when subsequently the adviser asks more directly – reading from the screen (now this question) – the claimant is more definite and suggests an earlier date (*Easter*, line 189), which the adviser accepts and enters (i.e. treats as a commitment).

4.6.2 Claimants respond by describing their medical/health circumstances

Generally, however, IBPAs' pursuits of claimants' thoughts and plans for work were inconclusive (to say the least). In many cases claimants responded with complaints about their health or other circumstances, in ways which made it difficult for IBPAs to pursue work plans. The interactional effect of this was to block further talk about work plans (we mean by 'blocking' here only the **interactional** consequence of the claimant's response, not the intention behind what they say). Here, claimants responded to enquiries about work plans, not by considering when they might be fit to return to work, but by further detailing/complaining about their health-related circumstances. That is, instead of answering 'when' they expect to return to work, they answer with various forms of health/illness-related information, or by complaining about other circumstances (for example, their treatment by a former or 'current' employer).

IBPAs' enquiries about returning to work are, therefore, frequently met with 'negative' or 'blocking' responses by claimants. This impedes rather than progresses IBPAs' objective of encouraging claimants to think about going back to work. Some of the tentative, qualified terms in which these enquiries are couched (for example, *if I could wave a magic wand; have you given it any thought; are you wanting some treatment*) already convey the IBPAs' uncertainty whether this is the right time to be considering returning to work. In other words, IBPAs' enquiries are already 'negatively valenced' – they display that they expect a negative answer.

An example is shown in Extract 4.6, where the IBPA makes two attempts to focus the talk on the claimant's future work plans. Note that the IBPA's first enquiry is strongly hedged or qualified (*or can you not make them at this sta::ge*, lines 3-4). There is evidence that this claimant is keen to resume work; hence, the IBPA's qualification here serves only to point the claimant in the direction of the difficulties preventing her returning to work, rather than encouraging her to consider what might be possible when her current health problems are resolved.

Extract 4.6 [127] IB Pathways initial (Nov 07)

This transcript begins 11.00 minutes into the interview with a claimant who is waiting to hear whether her employer is going to retire her on the grounds of ill health.

1 IBPA: U::m (0.6) what (0.6) are your- (.) feelings about (0.2)
 2 what- how you're gonna go forward from now on. Have you
 3 got any- (0.2) pla::ns or can you not make them at this
 4 sta::ge
 5 Cla: U:::m (1.0) hhhh. I think becau:se it's been h- (0.2)
 6 hel- (.) handled so badly by the school
 7 [and I've had (0.4) rea::lly (.) not a good time
 8 IBPA: [Mm
 9 Cla: at the school 'cos I've experienced a lot of (.) .hhh um
 10 homophobic bullying? [Which they haven't
 11 IBPA: [.tch °Oh dear°
 12 Cla: dealt with?
 13 IBPA: Yeah,
 14 Cla: .hhh U::m (0.2) I feel like they've just (0.8) left le-
 15 left me in mid air you know (.) back in Ma::y (0.4) they
 16 sent me to the occupational health: .hhhh um it took
 17 a:ges for the report to come through
 18 IBPA: Yeah
 19 Cla: and then they've left it three months:: (0.4) to (0.6) to
 20 now send me the forms so I feel like (.) I don't know
 21 (1.6) what- (.) 's happening real[ly
 22 IBPA: [Yeah
 23 (0.6)
 24 IBPA: .hhhh (°Right°) .hh So:: (0.6) what wh- what would you
 25 like to do: um if: they (da-) (.) for example if they
 26 give you the:: (.) medical retirement.
 27 Cla: U::m (1.4) .hhh I- I don't know because I don't know
 28 (0.4) they've not explained anything to me? .hhh Um if
 29 I take the ill health re:tirement I don't know whether
 30 I'm allowed to do so many hours? .hhh O::r (0.8)
 31 IBPA: [°Mm°
 32 Cla: They just have given me (0.4) no advice whatsoever.
 33 Th[ere's been no
 34 IBPA: [.Hhhh
 35 Cla: (0.6) help

To both enquiries (lines 1-4 and 24-26) the claimant responds by complaining about her treatment by her employer. This kind of response, though more usually with details of the claimant's medical complaint, is generally given in reply to the IBPAs' 'return to work' enquiries. Instead of assisting or encouraging the claimant in considering future employment, typically these enquiries lead claimants into reasons why they cannot work. Advisers' follow-up strategies, in which they attempt to come back to the focus on working in the future, are rarely effective. Once claimants are focused on the circumstances that prevent their working, it proves to be difficult to bring the talk back to future employment prospects.

4.7 Information about relevant programmes and service providers

Key points

- When in initial Pathways WFI IBPAs give information about what might be available in the future, they tend thereby to defer taking steps towards work either until subsequent meetings (if screened in) or until the medical condition is resolved.
- Thus, **deferral** of steps towards work is a principal theme in many initial WFIs.
- This can result in **missed opportunities** to encourage the claimant to take steps towards work (e.g. training, the Condition Management Programme).
- IBPAs in our sample generally did not emphasise the health benefits of working.

4.7.1 Screening and information giving; deferring steps towards work

IBPAs are careful to make clear to claimants that the purpose of the interview is not to put pressure on them to seek or go back to work; whilst advisers generally explain that their aim is to provide ‘help and support’ in moving back towards work (*to offer you the support you might need to get back to work* [082]), advisers almost always are explicit that *we’re not trying to make you go back to work...we don’t force anybody to do anything we just tell you the options* [127].

The phrase the adviser uses in that quotation, *tell you the options*, highlights what advisers treat as the principal purpose of these initial meetings. They are occasions for giving claimants information about the support and programmes that are available; and perhaps beginning to build rapport with claimants who they may see again at intervals over the coming months. Having tried to establish how far or close a claimant might be from working again – in other words having gathered information relevant for the screening tool – the aim of advisers in these initial meetings seems largely to be information provision.

A consequence of this focus on information provision in these initial meetings is that advisers generally defer doing anything more until subsequent meetings. This sometimes results in missing opportunities, for instance to refer claimants to relevant service providers. Claimants were recruited on to the Condition Management Programme in three of the 20 of these initial meetings; and to Work Preparation in one case [136]. If a claimant is not, subsequently in the interview, screened into Pathways, an opportunity is missed altogether, though if a claimant is screened in, then missing an opportunity may amount only to a delay in moving that claimant closer to work. It is relevant, therefore, that two of the three claimants who were recruited on to the Condition Management Programme were not screened in

for Pathways; moreover, the claimant recruited for Work Preparation was also not screened into Pathways (despite being keen to rejoin the labour force). So had advisers not successfully recruited these claimants for Condition Management and Work Preparation, those claimants would not have been encouraged to take further steps towards work, e.g. through the services of an external provider, until their next mandatory meetings which might be up to three years away. Either way, missed opportunities can arise from IBPAs regularly deferring measures to recruit claimants to activities that would be steps towards work.

4.7.2 Claimants' 'self-recruitment'

However, opportunities arose to engage claimants in steps towards work, particularly at moments when they expressed interest in some activity or scheme, or a desire to be involved in some aspect of the Pathways programme/Choices. An example of effective practice in this regard is illustrated in the following extract from the WFI with the claimant mentioned previously, who is unable to continue working as a carpenter.

Extract 4.7 [136] Initial IB (Nov 07)

1 Cla: hhhh. But erm I- all the time in all the years
 2 I've been a carpenter, I've always been interested
 3 in health and safety
 4 IBPA: Yeah
 5 Cla: Well I just took, cos I only done it last week, I
 6 done that health and safety test for the carpentry
 7 skills test. And I passed that with flying colours
 8 and I wondered if there was anything that I can
 9 follow up. I dunno how you become a safety officer
 10 IBPA: Mm hm
 11 Cla: But I wondered if there's any way I could find out
 12 something to do with that
 13 IBPA: Right. I was wondering if (Serena)* might be able
 14 to help you
 15 Cla: Yeah
 16 IBPA: with it you see. That was what's going through my mind
 17 Cla: Yeah I could ring her and see. I s- did see her the
 18 other day actually but not, didn't have, I wan't v- at
 19 that time I wasn't very well at all
 20 IBPA: Or I can ring her for you if you like
 21 Cla: Yeah
 22 IBPA: While, you know, while you're here
 23 Cla: Yeah
 24 IBPA: I mean that's one option that's open to you. Erm,
 25 another thing that we can do is refer you to er Work
 26 Preparation
 27 Cla: Yeah
 28 IBPA: Erm, now this is something run by ((service provider))
 29 er which is a similar firm to ((alternative service
 30 provider)) but it won't be overlapping with what
 31 Serena does cos it's the kind of preparation before
 32 you get to the stage of looking for jobs
 33 Cla: I see, yeah
 34 IBPA: Erm, very useful for people who changing direction

35 Cla: Yeah
36 IBPA: In what they wanna do. And it's mu- the lady who runs
37 it locally is called Gladys Knight* d- and she sees
38 people here
39 Cla: Yeah
40 IBPA: And they do different modules with you like things like
41 helping you to do CVs. I know Serena* will help you with
42 that
43 Cla: Yeah
44 IBPA: as well though. But talking to you about what might suit
45 you, trying to find
46 Cla: Yeah
47 IBPA: out different types of work that might suit
48 Cla: Yeah
49 IBPA: And they do about eight sessions of that, erm, they might
50 be in hourly modules or they might be a bit longer
51 Cla: Yeah
52 IBPA: But is- it's eight hours in total. And then after that
53 erm Serena* would f- actually find you a work placement

***Pseudonyms have been used here, to enable the reader to follow the adviser's references to different service providers.**

The claimant is eager to find work – as a safety officer – for which he is suited by his considerable experience in carpentry (lines 1-9). He has volunteered this interest, and enquires directly about how to find out more about such positions (lines 9-12). The adviser takes this opportunity to inform the claimant about service providers, including someone who can help find him a work placement (lines 13-16, and later 52-53), a Work Preparation service provider (lines 25-50). This information is tailored specifically to his needs and situation.

Moreover, the adviser is proactive in going beyond information provision; the claimant's suggestion that he might **ring her** and see provides the adviser with the opportunity to suggest instead that she call this provider to ask her to call the claimant direct – which the claimant readily accepts, and which (having off camera been to talk with a colleague) the IBPA confirms when she says later that (Name of provider) *will actually call you at home to arrange*.

This is effective practice in so far as the adviser takes the opportunity that arises – building on the claimant's clear interest in changing his line of work in order to adapt to his new health status – to go beyond information provision. She directly and successfully recruits him to relevant programmes and activities. She does not defer doing so until a subsequent meeting.

Similarly, as the adviser is giving extensive and 'tailored' information about the Condition Management Programme (data not shown), the claimant in extract 4.8 – who until this point has only acknowledged the information about what the programme covers (e.g. *Yeah, Mm hm*) – at this point expresses interest in joining the programme.

Extract 4.8 [127] Initial IB (Nov 07)

1 IBPA: Drawing up a po:sitive hea:lth statement to put
 2 on job applicat[i]ons is quite usefu[l]
 3 Cla: [Mm [Yea::h
 4 (0.2)
 5 IBPA: .tch [and wo:rking-
 6 Cla: [How- how- do I get- (0.2) how would I[:
 7 IBPA: [Well
 8 if you want to go on i::t [I- a:ll you have to
 9 Cla: [Mm
 10 IBPA: do is tell me and I'll refer you to them
 11 Cla: Yeah I'd- I'd- (.) quite like [to do tha:t
 12 IBPA: [Would you li:ke
 13 to [do i:t,
 14 Cla: [Yeah
 15 IBPA: Oh we can do that no::w
 16 Cla: [(Alright)/(Oh right)
 17 brilliant

The adviser acts right away on the claimant's expression of interest; she goes on to explain to the claimant what will happen next (data not shown), and – during the interview – forwards the claimant's details to the Condition Management Programme. In such cases as these (i.e. Extracts 4.7 and 4.8) advisers act to build on what in effect is claimants' self-recruitment; the claimant expresses interest in the programme or service being described, even asking whether/how they might join, and the adviser submits the claimant's name then and there (or otherwise takes appropriate measures to register the claimant for the programme).

4.7.3 Deferring steps towards work: the stance of postponement

In some contrast *to (doing) that now* in these previous examples, advisers more usually adopt a stance of deferral – giving information in such a way as to postpone the steps being described until some future time, either until some aspect of the claimant's medical condition(s) has been resolved, or until a subsequent (Pathways) meeting. This deferral or postponement is apparent in the next example, Extract 4.9, which begins very shortly after the adviser has introduced the Pathways to Work programme. She first frames her account of the Pathways programme by referring to the claimant's upcoming personal capability assessment, implying that no steps will be taken until after that assessment. She then refers to the Work Trial scheme entirely in conditional terms (*if it's something you'd like to do*) and for the future (*then obviously then we can start looking*) – despite the claimant having expressed interest in this aspect of the programme (*Would you look for that here for me?*).

Extract 4.9 [149] Initial IB (Jan 08)

1 IBPA: Going back to the, the original one, original payment.
 2 You also, then you have a personal capability assessment
 3 and that, that's your medical. So you say you've not had,
 4 you say you've not had a medical yet?
 5 Cla: No I've only just, I've only just returned the personal
 6 assessment form this week, so.
 7 IBPA: Right, so that's something that will come up in the next
 8 month or so, um (...) and it'll work on the same as before,
 9 er through our medical team ((laughs)) that's you, what
 10 everyone has to have. Now the next one we've got we, it's,
 11 it's, um it's called Work Trial so what you can do is um go
 12 to an employer now, um for three to six weeks, you stay on
 13 your benefits, um you get your travel allowance and your
 14 lunch allowance, um if you're struggling to find a job and
 15 you go there for three to six weeks to show the employer
 16 you can basically do the job, with a view of keeping you
 17 on, keeping you on afterwards. So that's there for you to
 18 sort of try something out.
 19 Cla: OK.
 20 IBPA: Er and that can be, it's got to be over sixteen hours, but
 21 you stay on your benefit so nothing's affected and you're
 22 not out of pocket. So that's there for you when you're
 23 ready. Um the other option um (...) is called permitted work
 24 and what that is, you can work under sixteen hours, stay on
 25 Incapacity Benefit er and earn up to eighty eight pounds
 26 fifty a week um (...) and you can do that up a year. So a
 27 lot of people like to try that out, say ten, ten twelve
 28 hours er, keep it under the eighty eight fifty with a view
 29 of increasing your hours um (...) at a later date.
 30 Cla: And for this sort of thing, would you look for that here
 31 for me?
 32 IBPA: Yeah, yeah, we can, if it's something you'd like to do,
 33 then obviously then we can start looking.
 34 Cla: OK.

It would, perhaps, not be so easy in this case to begin, there and then, to look for Work Trial opportunities for the claimant (not so easy, that is, in comparison with submitting a claimant for the Condition Management Programme). But an opportunity is missed to consider and explore how the claimant could move towards a work trial. There is a very clear sense of deferral in the way the adviser presents information about this scheme; indeed the sequence, and the entire WFI, ends with the adviser saying *So I'll leave you that to ponder through*, thereby deferring further discussion of plans to return to work until a later meeting. The claimant's apparent interest in work trials (lines 30/31) is met by the adviser agreeing that this might be followed up in the future, without making any concrete plan to do so now. An opportunity was missed, perhaps, to take more timely steps, based upon the claimant's expression of interest in the Work Trial scheme.

Initial meetings with IB claimants were more generally characterised by explicit expressions of deferral and postponement, at least until later meetings. The following examples illustrate advisers' focus on giving information that may be relevant or useful at some undefined point **in the future**. Beyond the matter of

determining whether claimants are to be screened into the Pathways programme, advisers are, generally, not oriented to the possibilities of registering claimants then and there for relevant schemes and programmes, or taking steps towards work. The subtext, as it were, seems generally to be that those steps are to be deferred until later.

Extract 4.10 [012] Initial IB (July 07)

1 IBPA: Right, as I say we'll go through this Choice, it's called
 2 Choices because that's basically, it is all about choices.
 3 Whilst you're on Incapacity Benefit you're eligible for
 4 all of these, so it might not be something that's relevant
 5 to you now but, especially after your operation and you're
 6 on the road to recovery.
 7 Cla: Right.
 8 IBPA: It might be something you might want to think of.

Extract 4.11 [143] Initial IB (Jan 08)

1 IBPA: Right, so I'll run through a couple of things in this
 2 pack, I don't know if a lot of it'll apply to you with
 3 Cla: Mm.
 4 IBPA: Like you say, you not being sure what'll happen next. Um
 5 like I say there's help available if you want to look
 6 at work.
 7 Cla: Yeah.
 8 IBPA: In the future part time.
 9 Cla: Yeah.
 10 IBPA: It could be an option, if that's something you want to
 11 try and go back into, so I'll just er sort of briefly
 12 explain what that's about. ((5 seconds)) You can do
 13 what's called permitted work where you can stop on
 14 your Incapacity Benefits.

In those lines highlighted in Extracts 4.10 and 4.11 (lines 4-8 and 2-11 respectively), the advisers explicitly emphasise that they are giving information about options, schemes and steps that may be relevant at some point in the future (e.g. *after your operation and you're on the road to recovery*) – despite the possibility that some steps might be considered, or even taken, before an operation (or whatever time point further action is being deferred until).

The significance of the adviser's deferral of 'help and support' until *you are ready to go back to work* (lines 1-5) is more strikingly evident in the following example, Extract 4.12. The claimant is evidently ready for work; this emerges only after the adviser begins to close the interview (line 17), at which point the claimant tells the adviser that he has been applying and being interviewed for jobs (line 23 onwards). So this problem – a clear barrier to work – has emerged only as the WFI is drawing to a close; and only because the claimant has raised it. It is a pressing and current problem for the claimant. But throughout the discussion of his lack of success when interviewed, the adviser assures him that there are things that they can do that **will** help. So consideration of and help with a current

problem is being deferred/postponed, until some future meeting(s) (see especially the highlighted sections).

Extract 4.12 [081] Initial IB (Oct 07)

1 IBPA: With Pathways to Work there's quite a bit of help and
2 support we can offer you.

3 Cla: Yeah.

4 IBPA: We've got things like, when you are ready to go back to
5 work there's quite a few monetary, monetary incentives,
6 um but before we get to that stage there's, there's other
7 programmes like our Condition Management Programme and
8 things like that can help to move you forward. So, as I
9 say, I'm not here to put pressure on you, we're just
10 trying to, to give you some support.
((6 lines omitted))

17 IBPA: OK, is there anything you want to ask me?

18 Cla: Not really. Look when I am ready to get back to work.

19 IBPA: Mm hmm.

20 Cla: There never seems to be any, any job vacancies anywhere,
21 there just doesn't.

22 IBPA: Well.

23 Cla: And I keep getting knocked back, I've had interviews I
24 keep getting knocked back cos, cos of this, as soon as
25 I mention this I can tell by their faces, puts them right
26 off, you know what I mean, oh have you, you know.

27 IBPA: And this is employers is it?

28 Cla: Yeah.

29 IBPA: Right, well we can help you, when you.

30 Cla: I've run out of places to.

31 IBPA: To, to go?

32 Cla: Just about, yeah.

33 IBPA: Right, what we'll do is, when, when you're ready to
34 make that step.

35 Cla: Yeah.

36 IBPA: I can help and support you with your job applications.
37 We can look at various different programmes that we've
38 got, we can look at different incentives that we've got
39 and hopefully we can get through.

40 Cla: Yeah.

41 IBPA: The barriers that way. We can maybe look at, have you got
42 a CV and things like that?

43 Cla: Yeah.

44 IBPA: We, we can maybe, if you bring that to your next interview
45 we can maybe have a look at the CV and see if there's
46 anything on there that we could amend.
.
((32 lines omitted))

79 IBPA: Did you get an interview with ((company name))?

80 Cla: Mm, got knocked back there an' all.

81 IBPA: Right, did you get, have you ever had any feedback from any
82 of these interviews as to why they haven't given you the
83 job?

84 Cla: Just unsuccessful or something like that, sorry but you
85 have been unsuccessful on this occasion, or something
86 like that.

87 IBPA: So how has this made you feel, getting these knock backs?

88 Cla: Well it (..) puts you down a bit doesn't it?

89 IBPA: Mm hmm.
 90 Cla: Just think (...) demoralised, that's the word I'm looking
 96 for.
 ((17 lines omitted))
 108 IBPA: OK, well I think, from what you've said to me there, that
 109 we've got quite a bit of stuff that we can look at.
 110 Cla: Mm.
 111 IBPA: And work with and try and improve your, your prospects when
 112 you feel that you're ready to start.
 113 Cla: Yeah.
 114 IBPA: Moving forward. But if you bring your CV along next time
 115 you come in to see me, just we'll have a look at it.
 116 Cla: Yeah.
 117 IBPA: And see if we think there's anything on there that needs
 118 amending. I mean probably be fine, if you're getting
 119 interviews I can't see there being any problems with it.
 120 But then we'll, we'll, we'll look and see what else we can
 121 put in place to help overcome those barriers.
 122 Cla: Yeah.
 123 IBPA: OK?
 124 Cla: Yeah.
 125 IBPA: All right

4.7.4 Missing opportunities

Finally, the 'default of deferral', as it were – the focus on just giving information for this present occasion, and deferring anything more until later – is visible in instances when very specific opportunities are missed, to take steps that would help the claimant towards work. Again, such opportunities arise during these initial meetings when claimants spontaneously express interest in certain schemes or opportunities. The following example begins with the claimant, a teacher in her 50s, indicating that although she is waiting for surgery on her wrist, she is considering a possible change in career, to clerical work (lines 10-11) (she may be/is expecting to be offered early retirement from her teaching position, due to other health-related circumstances which are not relevant here). They talk about the claimant being 'in limbo' until the surgery is completed.

Extract 4.13 [127] Initial IB (Nov 07)

1 Cla: .Hhh- (0.4) the other thing that's: that's sort
 2 of putting everything in abeyance is when I've
 3 had this su::rgery
 4 IBPA: Yea:[h
 5 Cla: [I'm going to be six weeks in plaster?
 6 IBPA: Yeah
 7 Cla: afterwards?
 8 IBPA: Oh I see
 9 Cla: So: um (1.0) you know one of the things that
 10 (0.4) we sort of talked about was (.) perhaps
 11 doing some clerical wo::r[k,
 12 IBPA: [Yea[h
 13 Cla: [.hhh but- (0.6)
 14 until I've had the operation, (0.2) you know I
 15 could s:ta:rt a job (0.2) and then I'm gonna be
 16 off six weeks:: (0.8) #m# you know waiting for

17 it- (0.6) to sort of a:ll [(.) heal 'cos they're
 18 IBPA: [Yeah
 19 Cla: gonna pin it, and (0.8) .hhh[hh
 20 IBPA: [So until you've had
 21 that done an[d until you know mo::re fro:m the
 22 Cla: [Mm
 23 IBPA:schoo::l [about what's gonna happen you' (re)
 24 Cla: [Yeah
 25 IBPA:() in limbo rea:ll[y,
 26 Cla: [Mm. Yeah

Just a few moments after that, the claimant asks about possibilities for retraining (Extract 4.14 lines 1-2 *Are there any forms of retraining do you do*). This is a 'self-recruitment' (volunteering) move that, as was noted above, claimants sometimes make as advisers are giving information – which provides opportunities to move claimants towards, or submit them to, relevant programmes, service providers and so on.

Extract 4.14 [127] Initial IB (Nov 07)

1 Cla: .HHH (.) Are there any (.) forms of (.)
 2 retrain:ing do you (0.2) do: (0.4) i[s it
 3 IBPA: [U::m
 4 Cla: possible to:
 5 IBPA: .t Uh we do- we don't do it but [we've got
 6 Cla: [Mm
 7 IBPA: people who can advi:se you a[bout (.) um (.)
 8 Cla: [Mm
 9 IBPA: what is avai:lable
 10 Cla: Yeah
 11 (0.2)
 12 IBPA: U::[m have you got anything in mind?
 13 Cla: [Because-
 14 Cla: .Hhhh (.) u::m (0.6) no, but- [(I) it's just
 15 IBPA: [(Yeah,)
 16 Cla: that I- (0.2)
 17 IBPA: Mm[:
 18 Cla: [I- don't particularly (0.2) u::m (1.0) I-
 19 I'd rather be doing something tha[n,
 20 IBPA: [Oh yea:h yea:h
 21 Cla: You know (1.4) at least feel useful.
 22 (0.2)
 23 IBPA: Yes::
 24 (0.4)
 25 IBPA: I mean- (0.2) do you: (0.4) are you thinking of
 26 (0.4) something to study now while (.) you know
 27 (.) y- you don't know (.) where things are going
 28 or d'you want to wait until you're feeling
 29 be[tter
 30 Cla: [U::m (0.8) no I- I'm quite-
 31 IBPA: because you mi- you know there might be [things
 32 Cla: [Mm
 33 IBPA: available in your local tech? that you might
 34 b[e interested i:n you know,
 35 Cla: [Yeah
 36 Cla: .h[hh Yeah

37 IBPA: [That kind o[f thi:ng.
 38 Cla: [I mean that would be (0.2)
 39 IBPA: Mm[:
 40 Cla: [quite useful
 41 (.)
 42 IBPA: Of course I think most of them (0.2) have um
 43 (0.4) started now but- .hhhh have you got a
 44 compu:ter at home (d[o you know)
 45 Cla: [No
 46 Cla: Unfortunately,
 47 (.)
 48 Cla: Sorry
 49 IBPA: You know you can use the ones in the library,
 50 Cla: Yes[:
 51 IBPA: [Yea[:h
 52 Cla: [Yeah
 53 IBPA: You just have to book the ti:me [on it
 54 Cla: [Yeah
 55 IBPA: U::m (0.2) Adult Learn In Leisure,
 56 Cla: M[hm
 57 IBPA: [might have something
 58 Cla: Yeah
 59 (0.2)
 60 IBPA: um (.) suitable for you if you look that up
 61 Cla: Ri:ght ok[ay
 62 IBPA: [Okay?
 63 Cla: Yeah,
 64 IBPA: U::m (3.2) this is a little bit premature but
 65 I'll just mention [it to you, (0.2) .hhh (.) uh
 66 Cla: [Mhm
 67 IBPA: if you a::re looking for a new kind of job
 68 a[t some point, we've got job brokers who can
 69 Cla: [Yeah
 70 IBPA: advise you

Here is an opportunity to put the claimant in direct contact with a service provider. However, the adviser initially responds with a negative formulation (*we don't do it but ...*, line 5), and then quickly moves from retraining through a service provider to giving the claimant information about what she might access from her local library (line 42 on). Although this is oriented to something the claimant might do right away, an opportunity is missed to take steps then and there to follow up the claimant's interest in retraining, for instance by putting her in touch with a service provider. Notice also that the adviser seems to have missed an earlier cue when in Extract 4.14 she asks *have you got anything in mind?* (line 12), although the claimant has already indicated that she's interested in the possibility of clerical work (Extract 4.13 lines 10/11).

The sense of deferring everything, of postponing pursuing any retraining options, is highlighted by the way in which the adviser moves on to give further information in line 64 ('This may be a little bit premature but I'll just mention it to you.'). Again, this illustrates advisers' orientation to just giving information in these initial IBWFIs, and the consequent deferral or service provision, for example. So that

when opportunities such as this arise, when claimants express an interest in some scheme or relevant steps towards work, those opportunities are sometimes missed.

4.7.5 Health benefits of returning to work

It was striking that rarely, if ever, did IBPAs mention the benefits that being in work might bring to claimants' health. Although this is a prominent theme in adviser training, in these initial meetings advisers did not mention health benefits. They referred only generally to the desirability of being in work, without specifically encouraging claimants to consider the health benefits of working.

4.8 Conclusions

There are a number of principal findings of this examination of initial Pathways WFIs with IB claimants.

Despite having received a letter and (usually) a telephone call, IB claimants often remained uncertain about why they have been asked in for interview, and what the purpose of the interview is. Furthermore, IBPAs had difficulty in explaining which aspects of Pathways WFIs were mandatory and which were voluntary; in brief, they frequently got into difficulties trying to explain that attendance was obligatory, but anything arising from the interviews was voluntary.

IBPAs' accounts of the agenda for the initial WFI were complicated by the fact that they did not know yet whether or not the claimant would be screened in, and their explanations were often confusing, and ineffective in reassuring claimants that the WFI was appropriate to them and their circumstances.

IBPAs often (perhaps generally) did not emphasise – at least, in their opening explanations – the real opportunities Pathways offered. IBPAs did not 'sell' Pathways; rather they conveyed, for instance when announcing the screening result, that Pathways was something of a 'penalty' rather than an opportunity.

Explicit references to the screening tool emphasised the process-led character of the interview; and by distancing themselves from the questions they were asking by referring to the screening tool, IBPAs further conveyed that the screening process was awkward, delicate, or dispreferred in some fashion.

Generally speaking, IBPAs' attempts to focus on claimants' plans or intentions to return to work were often 'deflected' by claimants, who took these enquiries as further opportunities to elaborate on their medical conditions, medical complaints, or other complaints (for example, about their treatment by an employer or agency). IBPAs tended, in these initial interviews, to focus on gathering and giving information; resulting in the deferral of further steps towards work until some point in the future (subsequent meetings, if screened in; or until the health condition has been resolved). So in the few cases in which claimants were recruited on to relevant programmes or referred to external providers, this was generally through a kind of 'self-recruitment'.

There was a marked tendency for advisers to defer steps towards work, postponing them until a later date, for instance until a claimant's medical condition had been resolved. They did so even when claimants expressed interest in the possibility of retraining and other appropriate schemes. Thus, IBPAs sometimes **miss opportunities** to respond positively to claimants' interests in taking steps towards work, despite them not being ready or fit for work at the present time. It was not clear whether this was because IBPAs were being inflexible in their administration of the process-led agenda, or whether they lacked information about what Jobcentre Plus/Pathways can offer. But on occasions they did not take advantage of opportunities to encourage claimants in developing and acting on their expressed interests in, for example, re-skilling. In addition, IBPAs tended not to encourage claimants to consider the benefits that being in work might bring to their health.

5 Mandatory initial and review Work Focused Interviews with lone parents claiming Income Support

5.1 Background to lone parent Work Focused Interviews

Due to associated high levels of poverty and child poverty, lone parents are a key target of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004). A main aim is to reduce lone parent unemployment in an effort to raise living standards for lone parents and their children. To this end, a range of policies has been introduced, covering the following four areas: *'the availability of childcare; helping lone parents move closer to the labour market; easing the transition from benefits into paid employment; and making work pay'* (*ibid.*: 1).²⁶

Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) are an important part of this drive to help lone parents back into work.²⁷ Introduced in April 2001, attendance at a WFI is now a requirement for all lone parents making a new or repeat claim to Income Support (IS); the claim will not be processed if the claimant fails to attend the interview. At the time of recording, subsequent review WFIs were held at three-, six- or 12-month intervals after the initial meeting, depending on the age of the claimant's youngest child. Since then, policy changes have increased the frequency of WFIs for

²⁶ For a summary of policies targeted at lone parents and their children, see Cebulla and Flore (2008), Thomas and Griffiths (2004). For full details, see Evans *et al.* (2003).

²⁷ See Thomas (2007) for a synthesis of evaluation studies on lone parent WFIs.

all claimants (see Thomas, 2007, for an overview of these developments). ‘Stock’ claimants (i.e. those who have been claiming IS for some time) receive letters of invitation to attend a WFI; sanctions are ultimately applied for failure to attend. However, apart from attendance at these meetings, any work-directed activity is voluntary. The aim of the WFI is to encourage and support lone parents to seek work and/or to undertake education and training opportunities directed at improving their employability (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004); but unlike Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants, lone parents are not required to actively be seeking and available for work.²⁸

Another key objective of the mandatory WFI is to increase entry onto the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programme. Available nationally since October 1998, this is a voluntary programme aimed at improving lone parents’ job readiness. The Personal Adviser (PA) is central to NDLP, which involves joining an adviser’s caseload in order to receive regular, individualised help. This includes: *face-to-face voluntary meetings where appropriate...[and] access to a wide range of advice, support, incentives and transitional and in-work benefits* (Thomas, 2007: 16). Mandatory initial and review WFIs are the main opportunities for encouraging lone parents to participate in NDLP. However, if a claimant is unwilling or unable to take part, the mandatory WFIs may be used to pursue similar aims, including: *encourag[ing] them to consider their long term goals, prepar[ing] them for the labour market in the longer term, and mak[ing] them aware of the services available to them in the future* (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004: 3).

NDLP meetings will be considered in Chapter 6. In the present chapter we focus on both initial and review, mandatory WFIs with lone parents claiming IS. We examine four key aspects of these interviews, namely:

- performing Better Off Calculations (BOCs) (Section 5.3);
- talking about childcare (Section 5.4);
- introducing, and pursuing, the question of work (Section 5.5);
- Encouraging claimants to join NDLP (Section 5.6).

5.2 Overview of the mandatory lone parent WFI subsample

In this chapter we examine recordings of 38 mandatory lone parent WFIs conducted by ten advisers. These include 17 initial interviews and 21 reviews. Table 5.1 shows a breakdown of the characteristics of this subsample. As the table

²⁸ At the time of recording, lone parents could remain on IS, without any requirement to look for work, as long as their youngest child was under 16 years of age. Current policy changes are reducing this eligibility over a three year-period (November 2008 – October 2010) so that only those whose youngest child is under seven will be eligible for IS.

shows, around 40 per cent (15 claimants) had made a claim to benefit previously. Of these, three had claimed IS before, eight had claimed JSA, one had claimed both, one had claimed Incapacity Benefit (IB), and for two the type of previous claim was unknown. As we would expect, more claimants attending an initial interview had not yet started their new claim. There are two exceptions, one of whom had had her interview deferred for health reasons. The reason for the delay in the second case is not known. Of those attending for a review meeting, about half (11 claimants) had not seen the same adviser previously.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of the mandatory lone parent WFI subsample

| Characteristic | Initial WFIs number of claimants | Review WFIs number of claimants | Total |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Gender | | | |
| Female | 16 | 17 | 33 |
| Male | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Age | | | |
| Teens | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 20s | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| 30s | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| 40s | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| 50s | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Ethnicity | | | |
| White British | 17 | 20 | 37 |
| Black British | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Previous claims | | | |
| Yes | 11 | 4 | 15 |
| No | 5 | 13 | 18 |
| Unknown | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Time on current benefit | | | |
| 0-1 year | 15 | 6 | 21 |
| >1 year-5 years | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| >5 years-10 years | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| >10 years | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Number of previous times claimant has seen this adviser | | | |
| 0 | 15 | 11 | 26 |
| 1 | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 |

Table 5.2 Length of mandatory lone parent WFI²⁹

| Claimant group | 0-15 minutes | 16-30 minutes | 31-45 minutes | >45 minutes | Range |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------|
| Initial WFIs | 4 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 8 – 61 |
| Review WFIs | 3 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 7 – 49 |

5.3 Better off calculations

Key points

- BOCs were conducted in 12 out of our sample of 17 initial WFIs; and in ten out of the sample of 21 review WFIs.
- Sometimes advisers introduce the BOC 'bureaucratically', explaining that it is something they **have** to do – thereby giving the BOC a negative slant.
- Effective practice is to fit the explanation for doing a BOC to a claimant's particular circumstances.
- In **initial** WFIs, claimants generally responded to the adviser's announcement of the outcome of the BOC in a non-committal manner.
- Advisers' subsequent attempts to present the BOC outcome favourably do not appear to improve the claimant's impression of the outcome.
- In the few cases where responses to the BOC outcome in **initial** WFIs were positive, the claimant had already expressed an interest in returning to work.
- Therefore (again in initial WFIs) the BOC does not appear to play a significant role in encouraging claimants to **begin** to consider work if they are not already doing so.
- BOCs appear to play a more significant role in review meetings, receiving more positive claimant responses and contributing towards an increased work focus.

5.3.1 Background to the BOC

Providing financial incentives to work is central to the Government's strategy for achieving their target of 70 per cent of lone parents in work by 2010. The BOC is considered to be a key means of conveying these incentives to claimants; it is also regarded, both by policy makers and advisers, as an important motivational tool

²⁹ 'On average, initial LPWFIs are quite short and general in content. The original planning assumption was that meetings would take up to one hour, and appointments were initially booked on this basis. In practice the average length of meetings was just under 30 minutes, though they can range from less than ten minutes to over an hour.'
(Thomas, 2007: 24)

(Knight and Kasparova, 2006; Thomas and Griffiths, 2004). To perform a BOC, the adviser inputs details of a claimant's current and potential financial circumstances to an on-screen tool. This calculates the change in income, should the claimant take up employment of a given number of hours per week, at a given salary.

There is some evidence of a positive association between work outcomes and a positive BOC outcome (i.e. one showing that the lone parent will be better off in work) for new/repeat claimants.³⁰ There is also evidence, from interview studies, that BOCs are viewed as valuable by both advisers and claimants. For example, advisers report that the BOC, with its capacity '*to quantify the margin by which a lone parent would be better off in work*', is the most important means of addressing claimants' fears of the financial risks of moving off benefit (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004: 38). Lone parents also report that they find the BOC useful. However, the BOC output may be difficult to understand. For instance, claimants who have not agreed to join NDLP seem to respond favourably to BOCs, yet may find them hard to follow during the WFI (Brown and Joyce, 2007). Additionally, while they appreciate being given a printed copy of the BOC to take away, claimants also report finding this difficult to understand without the assistance of an adviser.

How advisers use the BOC has been found to vary. Research suggests that they may, in some areas, be used only in relation to actual job vacancies, while in others they may be used as a means to explore claimants' needs and barriers to work. In some areas there appears to be a policy that BOCs should be carried out at every interview of a particular kind (e.g. with all six-month review claimants) (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004).

In our recordings, BOCs were conducted in 12 of the 17 initial lone parent WFIs recorded and in ten of the 21 reviews. BOCs took between four and 14 minutes to complete, most lying closer to the upper limit of that distribution. Although advisers sometimes asked claimants if they 'would like' a BOC, it was common for them to introduce the BOC as a requirement. This implies that, at least in some of the regions in which we made our recordings, there may have been a policy that BOCs should always be conducted with lone parents.

5.3.2 Introducing the BOC: bureaucratic requirement or something to assist the claimant?

The ways in which advisers introduced the possibility of conducting a BOC varied in two main ways: In some cases, advisers referred to BOCs as something that had to be done during the WFI, as in the following extract. Formulated as a constraint to which advisers 'have to' adhere gives the activity a 'bureaucratic' slant; the BOC

³⁰ See Knight and Kasparova (2006) for an analysis of the relationship between BOC outcomes, and work and benefit outcomes.

is being done because it is required as part of the process of claiming benefit. The benefit to the claimant is not emphasised.³¹

Extract 5.1 [087] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: So we do these for you from time to time. You'll probably
 2 find that when you come in in six months' time we'll do
 3 another one for you. We have to do them, basically,
 4 alright.
 5 Cla: (Yeah)

An alternative way of presenting the BOC is presented in Extract 5.2. Here, the adviser represents the BOC as something *we are going to do* (lines 1-2), and not as something *we have to do*. Moreover, she explains that by doing the calculation she is not disregarding the claimant's present circumstances (lines 7-15), but rather that the calculation could assist the claimant in planning how she will address her present financial difficulties (lines 25-27). In other words, the explanation is tailored to the claimant's particular circumstances.

Extract 5.2 [172] Review WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: Well what we're gonna do today ((first name)) is we're
 2 gonna do a better off calcu[l]ation for you
 3 Cla: [Mm
 4 PA: .hh (And) I can do this calculation on the minimum
 5 sixteen hour[s]
 6 Cla: [Mm
 7 PA: But it will show you how better off you can be
 8 claim[ing Working Tax Credit So even though you- you-
 9 Cla: [Yeah
 10 PA: you- you're doing really well and you're trying to better
 11 yourself by:: taking [advantage of the time that you've
 12 Cla: [Mm
 13 PA: got at home [to go and do further studyi[ng so tha-that's
 14 Cla: [Yeah [Yeah
 15 PA: gonna be really good to get qualifications in [that way
 16 Cla: [Mm
 17 PA: .HHH But by doing your one day studying while your
 18 children are at schoo[l if you were a::ble to do::
 19 Cla: [Mm
 20 PA: sixteen hours a wee::k
 21 Cla: Ye[ah
 22 PA: [Which when you break it down could be maybe (0.4)
 23 three or four hours a day
 24 Cla: Yeah
 25 PA: .hhh Erm it could be that by claiming Working Tax Credit
 26 and gaining this extra money it's gonna help you with the
 27 problems that you've got sort of financially

³¹ See also Section 4.5 in which IBPAs' use of 'have to' or 'need to' in describing claimants' mandatory attendance at WFIs was identified as carrying negative connotations.

The manner in which the adviser introduces the BOC is particularly well fitted to the claimant's immediately prior account of her financial difficulties and consequent keenness to work in order to bring her debts under control (discussion not shown). The claimant responds positively to the calculation that she would be £36 better off, reaffirming her interest in working in order to have more money each week. It is notable that in this **review** WFI the claimant has previously expressed an interest in returning to work, the significance of which will be developed in Section 5.3.5.

Effective practice relating to BOCs includes avoiding formulating the calculation as something advisers 'have to' do, and instead tailoring or **contextualising** the purpose of the BOC to the claimant's individual circumstances.

5.3.3 Non-committal responses to the outcome of BOCs in initial lone parent WFIs

In the majority of the 12 initial lone parent WFIs in which BOCs were conducted, claimants responded in a manner that can best be described as non-committal.³² Two examples are given in Extracts 5.3 and 5.4. The claimants' responses are generally 'non-responses' or only very minimal acknowledgements of the outcome reported by the adviser.

In Extract 5.3, the claimant responds in line 6 only by nodding. Having not taken other opportunities to respond to how much better off she will be (see the pauses in lines 10 and 12), the claimant only chuckles slightly in response to the adviser's encouragements (line 14).

Extract 5.3 [087] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: So it's actually worked out that you're gonna be getting
2 an income of a-hundred-and-fifty-eight as opposed to a-
3 hundred-and-twelve. And from that it works out that you'd
4 be forty-six pounds ninety better off taking a job of
5 sixteen hours a week.
6 Cla: ((nods)) ((may also be an inaudible verbalisation))
7 PA: Alright. And that's with your childcare taken into
8 account. And all your rent paid and all your Council Tax
9 paid. (.) hhhhh.
10 (2.2)
11 PA: Is that a surprise?
12 (0.4)
13 PA: huh [huh huh huh. Dunno what to think. Right.
14 Cla: [Heh heh ((barely audible chuckle))
15 PA: But it's there. So we do these for you from time to time.
16 You'll probably find that when you come in in six months'
17 time we'll do another one for you. We have to do them,
18 basically, alright.

³² The amounts by which claimants would be better off ranged from £24 to £100 per week (most were £40+). There does not appear to be any evidence that claimants' non-committal responses related to the amount by which they would be better off.

19 Cla: (Yeah)
 20 PA: But it- it's useful anyway for you to know what you can
 21 expect to receive at this point. Yeah, so you can get a
 22 rough idea of what, what your income's gonna be. Okay.
 23 Right. Any questions about that?
 24 Cla: No.

In Extract 5.4, the claimant agrees with the adviser's assessment of how much better off she would be, but only in the most minimal terms (lines 7 and 32).

Extract 5.4 [186] Initial WFI (Feb 08)

1 PA: Right then so based on the informa:tion- (0.3) that
 2 we've er:m (0.5) that we've put in (0.2) you would
 3 be better off by: (0.3) fifty-five pound thirty-two
 4 a wee:k by working twenty hours.
 5 (0.3)
 6 PA: So that's not too [bad is] it.
 7 Cla: [N:o:]
 8 (2.1)
 9 PA: So I'll show you how it wo:rks then.
 ((lines 10-18 omitted))
 19 PA: tch .hh so if you were working twenty hours a week
 20 then you'd get your child tax credits still. .hhh You'd
 21 get that amount working tax credit. .hh You'd still get
 22 some help towards your housing costs okay?
 23 (0.3)
 24 PA: You'd have your earnings and your child benefit.
 25 (0.2)
 26 PA: So coming out of that would be (.) your full rent
 27 and council [tax.] Which will that a week to=
 28 Cla: [Mm hm]
 29 PA: =live on. .hhh Which is fifty-five pound thirty-two
 30 a wee:k: (.) more than what you're on now.
 31 (1.4)
 32 Cla: Mm:::
 33 PA: Okay?
 34 (0.6)
 35 PA: So it's something to think ab[out] i'n't it=
 36 Cla: [Yea:h]
 37 PA: =Yeah?

There are two additional signs of apparent claimant indifference evident in these exchanges. Firstly, the pauses in lines 5, 8, 31 and 34 of Extract 5.4 further indicate a level of non-responsiveness. Secondly, both in Extracts 5.3 and 5.4, the advisers **pursue** some stronger indication of the 'impact' of the BOC, thereby treating claimants' responses as somehow **inadequate**. However, advisers' attempts to elicit a stronger response (lines 7-9 and 11 and 13 of Extract 5.3; lines 6, 33, 35 and 37 of Extract 5.4) are invariably unsuccessful.

In some instances claimants responded by indicating that additional income would not be a 'pull factor' towards employment because looking after their child(ren)

was their priority. In such cases, the BOC did not seem to be a motivating factor in encouraging claimants to consider work or work-related activities. This is illustrated in Extract 5.5.

Extract 5.5 [175] Initial WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: and once you've paid your fu:ll re:nt and your fu:ll
2 Cou::ncil Ta:::x .hh you a:re still better off by
3 fo:rtly fi::ve pou:nds sixty pence a wee:k so that's
4 (0.3) an extra fo:rtly fi:ve sixty pence a week on
5 to:p of what you already live on no:::w
6 (0.3)
7 PA: .hhh
8 (0.4)
9 PA: what are your vie:ws when you see: that extra amount
10 of money ((na::me))
11 (1.6)
12 Cla: I don't know cos I don't rea[lly:: hh.
13 PA: [ah ha ha ha ha .HHH[hh
14 Cla: ((smiley voice)) [me
15 money's i:n one hand and out o' t' other [no: matter
16 PA: [yea::h
17 Cla: ho:w much I ge[:t so::
18 PA: [yea:h
19 (0.5)
20 PA: but to be:: (0.1) a:nother forty five pou:nds a
21 wee::k on top of what you get no::w it's .hh (0.2)
22 it's quite a bi:g difference rea:lly isn't i::t
23 (0.5)
24 Cla: W(h)ell at mo:ment I:'m just getting u:sed to
25 getting sixty pound e:xtra anywa:y so::
((64 lines omitted))
90 PA: So:: (0.3) since you've ha:d this comparison do:ne
91 then ((na::me)) and you've see::n the difference it
92 ca:n ma::ke .HH has it made you: (0.3) think abou::t
93 consider:ng (0.3) looking for wo:rk a little bit
94 earlier than what you antici[pated do:ing
95 Cla: [N::o
96 (0.4)
97 Cla: No we're we- it co- I could::n't (0.2) I:: (0.2) I
98 mean I couldn't put babby through i::t at mome:nt

The claimant's priority to take care of her child (lines 97-98) is characteristic of the majority of lone parents in initial and review WFIs who indicated that they were not looking for work. However, the claimant in Extract 5.5 did show some interest in taking up work preparation activities later in the WFI, after the adviser had explored with her what work she would like to do in the future, and what steps might be taken towards that goal. This illustrates that the financial incentive of the BOC may sometimes not be the 'lever' which changes a claimant's views on work, or work-related activities. Rather, other strategies employed by advisers during the WFI may be more successful. How advisers approach the matter of childcare and open up discussion and exploration of work related activities are considered further in Sections 5.4 and 5.5.

5.3.4 Positive responses to the outcome of BOCs in initial lone parent WFIs

In contrast to the non-committal responses evident in the majority of those initial WFIs in which BOCs were conducted (and illustrated in Extracts 5.3-5.5), there were two examples where claimants responded **positively**. In Extract 5.6, even before the adviser has announced the outcome of the BOC, the claimant (who is watching the screen as information is being typed in) begins to respond enthusiastically to how much better off she will be (line 2). When the adviser verbally announces the result of the BOC (lines 18-19), the claimant responds equally enthusiastically (lines 20-25).

Extract 5.6 [099] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: So your to[t'l c'mbined
 2 Cla: [Oh I'll be much better off (.) mm[mm
 3 PA: [combined
 4 income is two eighty five .hh the comparison is::
 5 (1.0)
 ((12 lines omitted))
 18 PA: Leaves you two sixty eight so you'd actually be (.)
 19 ninety eight pou[nds thirty a week better off=
 20 Cla: [Ye::s
 21 Cla: =Well that you see well that's great for me because I
 22 actually want to g(hh)o back to [work because I don't
 23 PA: [back to work yeh
 24 Cla: want to be at home I- I find it hard being at home an
 25 dwelling on things I'd rather be out working
 26 PA: So if I print this off for you: [then you've got it=
 27 Cla: [Mmm
 28 PA: =If you go: to the care home and they (n)pay six pounds
 29 fifty and they [(give you) twenty hours a week
 30 Cla: [Uh hunh
 31 PA: Then we'll do another er[calculation for you
 32 Cla: [Right
 33 Cla: So hopefully I sh'be (in) soon cos I (fin-) they can give
 34 me some hours then I can start pretty much straight away

In both of the two cases of **initial** WFIs in which claimants responded positively to BOC outcomes, it was already clear from earlier in the WFI (indeed almost from the outset) that they were actively seeking work. This is made explicit in lines 28-34 of Extract 5.6. In these cases, therefore, the BOC appears to have served to **reinforce** claimants' previously established commitment to seeking work, rather than altering their viewpoint on work.

5.3.5 Positive responses to the outcome of BOCs in review lone parent WFIs

There is some evidence that claimants respond to BOC outcomes more favourably in review meetings. BOCs were conducted in 10 of the 21 review WFIs recorded. In only three cases claimants responded negatively. For instance, on learning that

he would be £43 better off, one claimant responded: *That's not very much, is it* [162]. In the other seven cases, claimants responded positively. These more enthusiastic responses to BOCs in **review** WFIs seem to be associated with the higher proportion of claimants considering or being ready for work in the near future. BOCs are therefore fitted to claimants' accounts of their circumstances and their readiness for work.

An example of this may be seen in Extract 5.2, in which the claimant responds positively to the resulting calculation of how much better off she will be. In this case not only is the adviser's account of the BOC outcome tailored to the claimant's circumstances, but the claimant has already indicated her real interest in returning to work. The matter of being better off is therefore of more concrete importance to the claimant in the near future.

It is important to acknowledge that these findings represent only the relatively small sample of lone parent WFIs that were recorded for this study in three regions around the country. Feedback from Jobcentre Plus staff (gathered through workshops) suggests that our findings about claimants' relatively negative responses to BOCs in **initial** WFIs and advisers' apparent lack of success in establishing the BOC outcome as an incentive to work may not represent practice or outcomes in some Jobcentre Plus offices. This suggests that there are further aspects of effective practice to be identified with respect to the conduct of BOCs, which could be explored through the collection of further lone parent WFI recordings.

5.3.6 Not conducting a BOC

BOCs were **not** carried out for claimants in five of the 17 initial WFIs recorded and in 11 of the 21 reviews. The apparent reasons for not conducting a BOC in an initial WFI tended to be either that the claimant had a BOC on a previous occasion (for another benefit claim) or that it wasn't relevant because, in their present circumstances, the claimant was not considering returning to work. These reasons were sometimes combined, as in one case in which the claimant mentions having had a BOC before and the adviser adds:

Extract 5.7 [030] Initial WFI (July 07)

1 PA: I don't really see that there's much point in doing one for
2 you today be[cuz of your circumstances] becuz you.hh you
3 Cla: [Mm
4 PA: won't know what your rent's gonn[a be in the house that
5 Cla: [Yeah I know
6 PA: you're gonna move in to etcetera .hh but ehm we can do
7 that >whenever you wish.<

5.3.7 Advisers' silence during data entry

We frequently observe, on the video recordings, long periods of time during which advisers silently type in information needed for the BOC to be performed. Whilst advisers are doing so, claimants are left to watch – silently and uninvolved.

By contrast, when advisers explain what they are doing, claimants are able to follow the necessary steps towards obtaining a BOC outcome. In some cases, they even grasp the point before they are told by the adviser (see Extract 5.6, line 2). It is therefore more effective to **describe and explain to claimants what information is being entered into the computer**, and why this is being done – to involve them in the process of constructing the BOC.

5.3.8 Effective practice

There are two key implications of these findings for effective practice when conducting BOCs:

- BOCs should be introduced as something to assist the claimant, not as something that 'has to' be done;
- explanations of the usefulness of the BOC should be tailored to the claimant's personal circumstances.

Our findings suggest that consideration should be given to the extent to which the BOC serves as a key motivational tool for those lone parents who are not already considering looking for work. From a policy point of view, this evidence should be reviewed alongside the previous research findings, which have suggested that some lone parents do find BOCs useful and motivating in their move towards the labour market

5.4 Childcare

Key points

- Advisers routinely addressed the topic of childcare during initial and review WFI.
- Questions which elicited discussion about a difficulty with childcare served as a springboard for information provision.
- Claimants' responses can often close down or 'block' the topic.
- The full picture of claimants' childcare needs may often need 'unpacking' through more than one question, to prevent a block from derailing the discussion.
- Questioning should also be used as a basis for tailoring information provision to a claimant's needs.
- Advisers can be more effective if they actively explore (rather than simply accept) the barriers and hesitations expressed by claimants.
- Advisers might benefit from further guidance on the childcare-related help available to claimants undertaking training.

5.4.1 The importance of addressing childcare in lone parent WFI

Previous research for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has emphasised that it is crucial for advisers to address the topic of childcare during lone parent WFIs (Thomas, 2007). The goal is not only to deal with practical issues of childcare costs and availability, but also to tackle lone parents' perceived difficulties with combining work and childcare. A key issue for lone parents is their confidence in the flexibility of childcare arrangements to adapt to changing circumstances in the future. Past research suggests that lone parent WFIs are having some impact in this regard, *with around half of lone parents saying they felt more confident about dealing with childcare after their LPWFI* (Thomas, 2007: 45).

Addressing childcare during the WFI is complex because of the variability in claimants' circumstances, perspectives and preferences. It is important, therefore, to equip advisers not only with **knowledge** about childcare-related support, but also with the **skills** to talk through the claimant's individual situation.

5.4.2 Asking questions about childcare

In the present sample, advisers routinely addressed the issue of childcare during both initial and review lone parent WFIs. They typically introduced the topic by means of a question, such as:

So if you were to work then what about childca:re are you alright with
childca:re o:::r [168; Initial]
And then you'd be happy to use formal childcare would you? [101; Review]
How're you managing with childcare [089; Review]

Claimants' responses varied widely, depending on individual circumstances and preferences. However, a key distinction can be made between those responses that **open up** and those that **close down** or **block** further discussion about childcare. The following two extracts illustrate this distinction. In Extract 5.8, the adviser's question elicits talk about a difficulty: the claimant currently cannot afford to pay a childminder. This creates a slot for the adviser to provide information about how the claimant could receive help with these costs through Working Tax Credits. By contrast, in Extract 5.9, the claimant responds with an explicit 'no' to the adviser's question about whether she would need registered childcare. In this case, no convenient slot is opened up for the adviser to provide information and nothing further is said on the topic in this interview.

Extract 5.8 [089] Review WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: How're you managing with childcare 'cos obviously I
 2 didn't ask you [()
 3 Cla: [U::m we:ll (0.4) I've been (0.4) plugging
 4 about with neighbours and f:amily [on the other side of
 5 PA: [O::h right
 6 Cla: to:wn 'cos .hh couldn't afford to pay them just yet .hhh
 7 PA: Right
 8 Cla: There's a childminder I kno::w (0.2) [she's like a friend
 9 PA: [Yeah
 10 Cla: of me aunty's
 11 PA: Yeah?
 12 Cla: but I thought well I'll wait 'til I come in (0.2) today
 13 to see (0.6)
 14 PA: Righ[t
 15 Cla: [what help and everything I get before I see her
 16 (0.2)
 17 PA: Because obviously (0.4) if you get tax credits:: (0.6)
 18 you get help with childcare costs
 ((Continues with BOC to show how this would impact on her income))

Extract 5.9 [186] Initial WFI (Feb 08)

1 PA: Would you require registered childcare if you were working
 2 (0.4)
 3 Cla: U:h no
 4 PA: No

We use the term 'block', then, to refer to the interactional consequence of the claimant's response, not the intention or psychology behind what they say. While blocking can indicate resistance to using childcare, this is just one of a range of reasons why a block might occur. For example, the following two extracts show how the wording of the adviser's question can have an impact on whether further discussion about childcare is opened up or closed down. Both are drawn from the same initial WFI. In Extract 5.10, we see the adviser's first question relating to the claimant's childcare arrangements. The claimant's response implies that she does not require childcare and the adviser moves on to other questions. However, she later returns to the topic of childcare, as shown in Extract 5.11. In response to her more specific question, it emerges that the claimant does need information about childcare during school holidays.

Extract 5.10 [099] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: D'you have good family support to help you look [after
 2 Cla: [Yes
 3 PA: the children
 4 Cla: Yeah I have- my family are good

Extract 5.11 Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: Will you need (0.2) childcare whilst you're working
 2 what will you do during the holidays:
 3 Cla: Who knows:
 4 PA: Right okay
 5 Cla: Who:: knows I haven't got a clue
 6 PA: [Right okay
 7 Cla: [I'm hoping that my parents might be .hh but they're not
 8 always around 'cos they go away quite a lot
 9 PA: Okay if I give you this one ((referring to leaflet))
 10 Cla: Mm
 11 PA: Just bear that in mind and once we know what you're doing
 12 then we can take it (0.2) that [step further but this is-
 13 Cla: [(Wh-) / (Right)
 14 PA: (.) .hh ((county name)) Children's Information Service
 15 Cla: Yeah
 16 PA: They have (all) list of all childminders childcare
 17 providers
 18 Cla: [(Mm)
 19 PA: nurseries [camps available
 20 Cla: [(Yeah)
 21 Cla: Yeah
 22 PA: during the holidays
 23 Cla: Right okay
 24 PA: .hh Once you do sixteen hours or more tax credits will
 25 pay eighty per cent of any childcare costs for you...
 ((Continues with further information provision))

These examples illustrate the importance of 'unpacking' the matter of childcare, rather than allowing a single 'block' to bring the discussion to a close. One strategy for doing this is to ask more than one question about childcare so that the topic may be approached from different angles. This could help to establish a fuller picture of the claimant's childcare circumstances and needs.

5.4.3 Tailoring information provision

Questioning is also important as a basis for providing claimants with information that is tailored to their circumstances. For example, in the following extract, the adviser builds his knowledge of the claimant's situation – gained through earlier questioning – into his explanation of the help available.

Extract 5.12 [132] Initial WFI (Nov 07)

1 PA: So:: if you were considering work then (1.6) a:nd your
 2 mum got a job (0.6) you know and so she couldn't look
 3 after (0.4) your daughter, (0.4) () ((child's name))
 4 (0.4) .tch .hhh um and you had to get a child minder to
 5 look after her or something like that, and you were doing
 6 I don't know three days a week or [something (.) .tch .hhh
 7 Cla: [Mm
 8 PA: it would cost you seventy fi:ve pounds a week (.) .hh but
 9 you'd get (.) eighty per cent towards that (0.2) in a
 10 worki[ng tax credit world
 11 Cla: [.tch Oh right

By contrast, in some cases advisers provided standardised information without any tailoring to the individual. In Extract 5.13 the adviser and claimant have talked at length about training possibilities but the opportunity to inform the claimant about childcare during training is very nearly missed. Although the adviser provides information about financial support via Working Tax Credits (lines 3-6), she does not, of her own initiative, provide any information about help with childcare costs if the claimant goes to college.³³ The adviser only provides this information because the claimant initiates the discussion (lines 18-20) at the point where the adviser has already moved to close the interview (lines 7 and 17). The claimant also volunteers the sort of information that is commonly elicited by advisers through questioning ('no extended family who would have them', lines 28-29).

Extract 5.13 [092] Review WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: That's how much better off you'd be
2 (0.5)
3 PA: .h Now (0.5) the rea:son I haven't put childcare in yet
4 is I want- jus:t show you what difference it makes .hhh
5 if you get working tax credit (0.3) you actually get
6 eighty percent of your childcare paid for you
(lines omitted during which the BoC is completed)
7 PA: Right (.) I think that'll do for today then ehm:: cos (.)
8 you know obviously with ((child's name)) age as you say
9 you- you know it's a bit soon yet [.hhh but if you maybe
10 Cla: [Yeah
11 PA: just think about whether you want to go:: you know (0.3)
12 have a look at the college and getting a placement .hh
13 maybe even if it's next September
14 (0.8)
15 PA: You know (it-)
16 (1.1)
17 PA: Er::m and I will be s[eeing y-
18 Cla: [So in the co- even if I did go to
19 college with this with (0.3) ((child's name)) not being
20 in nursery or anything would I be able to get her minded
21 (0.2)
22 PA: .t .hh[hh Y- Yeah you'd have to check with
23 Cla: [Would they do (mind-)
24 PA: the college they do actually have nursery and crèche
25 facilities in there [.hh eh:m
26 Cla: [Yeah
27 PA: there's always a lot of competition fo:r them
28 Cla: You see cos that's- that's sommit I'd have to do cos I
29 haven't got no extended family who w[ould have them
30 PA: [Right: right .h eh:m
31 (0.4) they also sometimes have some funding if their ow:n
32 nursery is full they can sometimes pay for you to use
33 private childcare
(Continues with further information provision))

³³ In general, advisers seemed more confident providing information about help with childcare costs for claimants in work than for those in training.

This example clearly illustrates the importance of combining questioning with information provision so that the information is tailored to the claimant's needs.

5.4.4 Exploring barriers to use of childcare

In some cases, questioning will uncover barriers to the use of childcare. For example, many lone parents in the sample placed high priority on **personally** caring for their child and expressed some resistance to using registered childcare, as shown in Extract 5.14.

Extract 5.14 [169] Review WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: So you- you're totally responsible for your-
2 [your own ch[ildca:re
3 Cla: [Yeah [yeah
4 (1.0)
5 PA: How do you feel about registered childcare ((claimant's
6 name))
7 Cla: No.
8 (0.2)
9 PA: ((laughs))
10 Cla: No::: wa:y [no no.
11 PA: [No: no: Yeah, is that just because of bad reports
12 you've heard on [documentaries o:::r have you had a bad
13 Cla: [.hh Yea::h yeah
14 PA: experience yourself with your- your chi:ld
15 Cla: .hh No it's [just-
16 PA: [No:
17 Cla: (0.4) I fetched him into this world
18 PA: [And you feel like you should look after him
19 Cla: [I look after him
20 Cla: Yeah
21 PA: Okay

While it is important to avoid placing pressure on lone parents to use registered childcare (Brown and Joyce, 2007), advisers need strategies for helping claimants to think through the range of options open to them. Again, the aim is to open up discussion. Extracts 5.15 and 5.16 illustrate two scenarios where claimants feel that they cannot work due to childcare responsibilities at the present time. The claimants' circumstances are similar in that both have school-going children, aged 9 and 11, respectively. Although the particular barriers and hesitations about childcare that the claimants express are different, we can see from the two examples that advisers vary in how proactive and persistent they are in exploring and challenging the claimants' barriers.

Extract 5.15 shows a later segment of the WFI with the same claimant introduced in Extract 5.14, who has stated she does not wish to use registered childcare. Accepting the claimant's preference, the adviser offers her an alternative solution of taking up part-time work during school hours. The claimant presents a further barrier to this option, but again this is challenged by the adviser (see lines 10-36), who draws on her own experience and that of working parents more broadly.

This appears to be effective in beginning to alter the claimant's perspective on the possibility of working part-time (see lines 37 and 39). Despite the claimant's previous blocks, the adviser also ensures that she provides information about registered childcare, tailoring this to fit the claimant's position. She acknowledges the claimant's right not to use registered childcare, yet spells out the options, which might include some that the claimant had not considered on first hearing the term 'registered childcare'. This ends in the claimant seeming to moderate her previous outright resistance (see lines 74, 76 and 79).

Extract 5.15 [169] Review interview (Jan 08)

1 PA: So do you feel that you would be ready to maybe (0.2)
 2 look for part time work within school hours at a:ll
 3 Cla: .hh No. See this is me problem again if he's poo:rly and
 4 um- employers don't understand do they really
 5 PA: Yeah
 6 Cla: And (0.2()) there's no-one to pick him up (.) I ain't got
 7 no-one to pick him up
 8 PA: Yeah
 9 Cla: So:: no not really.
 10 PA: Yeah .hhh The- the way that I would turn that around is
 11 that the fact like someone like myself who works full
 12 time with children I'[m in the same boat as yourself .hhh
 13 Cla: [Yeah
 14 PA: and basically what I would have to do if: my little girl
 15 or anything like that was poorly at home then I would
 16 have to mention it to my employer to see whether or not
 17 I'd be able to .hh be released so that I could go and
 18 help
 19 Cla: Ye[ah
 20 PA: [uh my daughter. .hhh So what what you describe and I
 21 understand where you're coming from
 22 Cla: [Yeah
 23 PA: [But what you're describing is something that everybody
 24 who works
 25 Cla: Yeah [I know
 26 PA: [.hhh Either [part time or full time would have to
 27 Cla: [Yeah
 28 PA: address at that particular m[oment in ti:me .hhh So by by
 29 Cla: [Yeah
 30 PA: working sixteen hours a week if you looked at sixteen
 31 hours a week and spread it out throughout the week
 32 Cla: Yeah.
 33 PA: it's a few hours within school hours [a week so do you
 34 Cla: [Yeah
 35 PA: still feel that that would be something that you would
 36 maybe want to consider at a:[ll
 37 Cla: [Yeah yeah
 38 PA: Yeah?
 39 Cla: It's only a couple of hours a day in't it so:
 40 PA: Looking at sixteen ho[urs
 41 Cla: [Yeah.
 ((lines omitted))
 42 PA: If for whatever reason ((claimant's name)) (0.2) er
 43 (well) we're looking at sixteen hours .hh but if (0.2)

44 if we did have to: .hh consider childcare or anything
45 like that obviously that's still your choice but I just
46 want to make you aware that while you claim Working Tax
47 Credit [if you did need .hh
48 Cla: [Yeah
49 PA: registered childcare i.e. like an after school club a
50 breakfast club
51 Cla: M[m
52 PA: [.hh where your son goes to or if you needed a
53 childminder just for a couple of hours at the end of each
54 day .hh Inland Revenue will pay ei:ghty percent of your
55 registered childcare costs so there is some financial
56 help and support with childcare
57 Cla: Oh right
58 PA: If you need it
59 Cla: Mm
60 PA: .hh Do you know whether or not there is a:: an after
61 school[l club
62 Cla: [.hh They do a [breakf-
63 PA: [Or a breakfast [club
64 Cla: [((clears throat))
65 They do a breakfast club I know that [(they-)
66 PA: [D'you think [((child's name))
67 Cla: [They've only just started it they've
68 onl[y just sent- sending forms out
69 PA: [Yeah?
70 Cla: so:: they do do [that
71 PA: [Yeah
72 PA: And do you think ((child's name)) may enjoy something
73 like that
74 Cla: Yeah might do [yeah
75 PA: [Yeah?
76 Cla: Mm:
77 PA: So obviously all the doors aren't closed at the moment
78 [then
79 Cla: [No]

By contrast, in Extract 5.16, the adviser seems simply to accept the barriers expressed by the claimant and his position that he will not be able to work until the child is older. There appears to be a 'missed opportunity' here because the claimant displays willingness to use childcare, explaining that he has tried to arrange childcare before, but was unsuccessful (see lines 5-10). Moreover, the claimant has evidently been in discussions with an employer at some point in the recent past. The main problem has been that the childcare available locally was not compatible with the hours of work he had been offered. However, the adviser offers no active help with solving the claimant's current childcare difficulties, simply providing a leaflet (see lines 25-36), which he treats as something the claimant **might** need **in future**. Consequently, the claimant is not actively assisted in thinking through his options for returning to work at this stage.

Extract 5.16 [162] Review interview (Jan 08)

1 PA: So if you are thinking of going back into a working
2 situ[ation].
3 Cla: [It'll be another couple of years ye[t because (0.2)
4 PA: [Right
5 Cla: I mean (0.6) I've tri:ed (0.4) when I come for me first
6 interview I tried getting childcare
7 PA: Ri::ght
8 (0.4)
9 Cla: and they could only offer me so many days a week in t'
10 village (.) d'you know what [I mean
12 PA: [((Coughs))
13 PA: [Right.
14 Cla: [And (1.2) ((company's name)) wouldn't employ me then
15 (0.2)
16 PA: R[ight
17 Cla: [on so many days
18 PA: Right [yeah
19 Cla: [So I'm gonna leave it now while she's (0.8)
20 responsible
21 (1.0)
22 PA: R[ight
23 Cla: [You know [so:
24 PA: [That's- that's- (.) that's fine.
((lines omitted))
25 PA: If you do nee::d any help with childcare (0.2)
26 Cla: [Mhm
27 PA: [You know f- sourcing childcare I m[ean
28 Cla: [Yeah
29 PA: I'll give you this leaflet here and that number there
30 that's- that's local round(s) so if you do need to ever
31 phone round for 'em
32 Cla: Yeah
33 PA: and find out who- who- you know after school clubs and
34 all the rest of it that- that- that has got everyone
35 there OK
36 Cla: Right
((lines omitted))
37 PA: And I'll put in he:re you will return to ((company's
38 name)) when you feel the time is right for yourself and
39 your daughter
40 Cla: Mm hmm.
41 PA: And you're not looking for work at the present time due
42 to childcare childcare responsibilities (0.4) but you're
43 aware of what's available for you on New Deal
44 Cla: Yeah.
((lines omitted))
45 Cla: I mean at minute she only goes to her mum's three times a
46 week
47 PA: Ri::g[ht
48 Cla: [An- and it's two hours maximum
49 (0.4)
50 PA: Yeah.
51 PA: Ye- you- you- you- you're you're a bit uh
52 Cla: Yeah.
53 (0.6)
54 PA: You're up against it a bit aren't you

These two examples represent opposite ends of a continuum, from virtually no attempt to unpack a claimant's childcare-related concerns (Extract 5.16) to repeated and extensive efforts to do so (Extract 5.15). Adviser discretion will be required to help claimants think through their options without pressuring them to take up childcare provision. However, effective practice would typically involve not allowing the presentation of barriers by the claimant to curtail further discussion of the topic.

5.4.5 Effective practice

Drawing together these findings, the following points might be considered as effective **practice** for talking about childcare:

- **questioning** is important for uncovering claimants' individual circumstances;
- but a single question alone may not be sufficient – the topic of childcare should be '**unpacked**' from different angles in order to understand the claimant's key concerns;
- information should be **tailored** to those concerns.

Of course the recorded discussions alone cannot tell us how the claimants will act after their WFIs. However, interviews are the sole domain in which advisers can work to address lone parents' perceived difficulties combining work and childcare. What advisers do **within the talk** about childcare is therefore central to their role. The ability to open up – and unpack/pursue – discussion about childcare options is an important factor in adviser effectiveness.

5.5 Focusing on work in lone parent Work Focused Interviews

Key points

- The great majority of WFIs in the sample were, as intended, focused on work.
- Asking claimants whether they are looking for work **at the moment** is less productive than asking them whether they plan to work **in the future**.
- Even when claimants responded negatively to initial enquiries about their work plans, advisers generally pursued discussion of future work and possible trajectories towards it.
- This was best done, not by providing general, standardised information, but by giving advice which relates to claimants' particular circumstances and plans.

5.5.1 Are lone parent WFs work-focused?

Given the absence of any requirement for lone parents claiming IS to be actively seeking work, advisers might be seen as having more limited resources in engendering a work focus during lone parent WFs than in interviews with JSA claimants – especially if a lone parent has indicated that they are not interested in working at present or for the foreseeable future.

The present data provide an opportunity to explore the extent to which lone parent WFs are indeed work-focused. A focus on work in these interviews includes both advisers' **enquiries about** claimants' work plans; and **pursuit of** these plans, by following up what work claimants might do in the future (and what training they might need for example). The analysis has therefore examined advisers' **initial enquiries** about claimants' work plans; and their **subsequent fuller discussion** of these plans (pursuing the matter of work).

It appears that the great majority of lone parent WFs in our sample were indeed work-focused. In the recordings, advisers were often careful to make it clear that they were not putting any pressure on claimants to consider work immediately. Instead, their purpose was to inform claimants of the various kinds of support available through Jobcentre Plus to help lone parents back into work **when the time was right**. However, claimants' readiness for work and the kind of employment they envisaged were discussed in most of the lone parent WFs. There does not appear to be any difference in the extent to which work was a focus in initial and review WFs. Work was a significant focus in 15 of the 21 review WFs recorded – proportionally the same number as in initial WFs. In only a few exceptional cases of initial and review WFs was the matter of work not raised or pursued.

These cases resulted from the following circumstances:

- the claimant was in some kind of regular or full-time training;
- the claimant indicated early in the interview that they had no immediate plans to seek work, and the adviser did not pursue work/training plans for the future;
- the interview quickly became focused on assisting the claimant with a problem with their benefit claims;
- the adviser presumed that the claimant would not be looking for work.

5.5.2 Presuming that the 'time is not right' to think about work

All of the above scenarios raise the question of whether the adviser might **still** have pursued some exploratory questions about work plans with the claimant, despite their more immediate activities or concerns. But it is perhaps the fourth that appears most problematic. In a small number of cases, advisers seem to presume that claimants are not seeking work, even before the claimant has stated their current thoughts on the matter. The following examples in Extracts 5.17 and 5.18 illustrate how quickly advisers may come to assume that the 'time is not right' for claimants to look for work.

In Extract 5.17, the adviser appears to be asking the claimant whether she is thinking about doing any work (lines 7-8), but adds 'probably not yet', thereby indicating that he presumes that circumstances are not yet right for her to begin work again. The claimant has a young baby, and in these circumstances it might be reasonable to suppose that she is not ready for work. However, there is nothing to suggest explicitly in the foregoing discussion that she would not wish to work. More importantly, the adviser proceeds on the basis that there are no steps to consider in **preparation** for work. He assumes that because the claimant is not yet ready, there is nothing more to be done at this stage; he does not encourage her to consider **stepping stones** towards work in the future. This assumption is highlighted by his curtailing the interview (lines 1-2) even before he has asked about her plans for work.

The circumstances of the claimant in Extract 5.17 are comparable to those of other lone parents with whom advisers **do** pursue work intentions and aspirations, at least as regards considering training and other programmes which might help them into work at some point in the future.

Extract 5.17 [123] Initial WFI (Nov 07)

1 PA: So I think it will be April (.) er:m at the end of
2 April that we'd have to see you you'll get another-
3 you'll [get a letter through telling you to come in
4 Cla: [Yeh
5 PA: And have a chat [en sort of see how things are
6 Cla: [Yeh
7 PA: Erm Are you thinking about trying to th- do
8 anything=probably not ye:t?
9 Cla: N:: probably not for for a couple of years really
10 at least because you know I'm not yeh I don- I jus'
11 don't see the point pay- going out sp- you know
12 earning money and then sp- paying it to someone
13 else to bring up my child

The presumption that the claimant – who has recently moved from another part of the country and is yet to arrange permanent accommodation – will not be seeking work is equally apparent in Extract 5.18. Having explained the purpose of the interview, the adviser says – about work – that *obviously for you it's not on the agenda* (lines 37-38). As in Extract 5.17, the adviser again concludes that the next step is to see the claimant again routinely in six months' time; further stepping stones towards work, or programmes which might help prepare her for work, are presumed not to be relevant (see especially lines 41-44, in which the adviser seems to equate not being ready for work with not needing the services offered by Jobcentre Plus).

Extract 5.18 [087] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: Okay. So this interview just is (was/is) basically
 2 to tell you that we're here and when you do need
 3 us, we can help you. And the kinds of things we do
 4 is we help you claim your Tax Credits.
 ((25 lines omitted during which the adviser explains about the kind of help available))
 29 PA: So there's quite a lot of different things we can help you
 30 with, okay.
 31 Cla: (Right)
 32 PA: So it's all part of the service. And if you're
 33 starting to look for work and you want regular help
 34 you can come an- in and see us, (done) every four
 35 weeks or so, if you want to.
 36 Cla: Yeah.
 37 PA: But obviously for you, it's not on the agenda at
 38 the moment, but it's just an awareness that we're
 39 here
 40 Cla: Right
 41 PA: What we actually do, if- if you don't want to use our
 42 service immediately, we have to see you every six months,
 43 okay. Erm so I've seen you today, we'll probably see you
 44 again in April.

Although these are exceptional cases, they are worth highlighting because **presuming** that claimants will not be seeking work has the consequence of forestalling further discussion of their work plans. In the preceding examples, the claimants simply **confirm** that they are not yet ready for work (line 9 in Extract 5.17 and line 40 in Extract 5.18), after which the interview moves away from any work focus.

5.5.3 Asking about claimants' work plans

Advisers have a fairly standard form of words for asking about claimants' work plans, enquiries that initiate the focus on work during the interview. That format is illustrated in Extract 5.19.

Extract 5.19 [94] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: You know, they'll just come back and see me
 2 when they're gonna be starting so I can sort out
 3 things like the Tax Credits and everything else
 4 with them. Erm, so- (pause) Right, so at the
 5 moment, are you actually looking for work?
 6 Cla: Oh, I've got plenty of work, believe me
 7 PA: Yeah?
 8 Cla: Pl- well yeah, I've got five kids

The adviser in Extract 5.20 uses a similar enquiry (lines 7-8), although in this case she places the enquiry about whether the claimant is looking for work in a more elaborate context fitted to what she has learned about the claimant's particular circumstances (lines 1-7)

Extract 5.20 [030] Initial WFI (Jul 07)

1 PA: .hhh Right. So- I mean: (0.3) .klh Ou (0.2) >Obviously
2 you're looking for a place to live and that's your
3 priority. and getting your money sorted is< your
4 priority at the moment[:. >.hhh< I mean (0.1) wha-=
5 Cla: [Yeah
6 PA: =once all every- everything's settled down what are
7 your plans:, What are you thinking you might do, >°
8 I mean*°< Are you looking for work[, at the m[oment.
9 Cla: [>.hh< [No not
10 at the (moment me)

This format – specifying the claimant's **immediate** thoughts and plans for work – is relatively unsuccessful, insofar as it tends to inhibit talk about plans for working. It enables claimants simply to respond that they are not looking for work; which makes it difficult for the adviser to pursue the topic. In this respect, it does not appear to make much difference whether advisers use the relatively brief format illustrated in Extract 5.19 or the more elaborated, 'tailored' version in Extract 5.20: in each case, the claimant effectively 'blocks' the matter of work by replying that they are not looking for work. An alternative way into discussion of work intentions is to ask about **future** plans, as illustrated in Extract 5.21.

Extract 5.21 [087] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: Okay. Right. Now w- one of the key things we, we talk
2 about in these interviews is what your future plans
3 are with regards to work especially. And have you
4 worked before?
5 Cla: Just as a training hairdresser
6 PA: Right, okay. And have you got any plans to go back to
7 work in the, the future?
8 Cla: I was thinking about going back to college when
9 ((daughter's name)) started school next September

The difference between 'at the moment' and 'in the future' is that, if claimants are not planning to look for work at present they can easily answer in the negative if asked about their current work plans; whereas even if they are not currently seeking work, claimants always agree (in some fashion) that they intend to work in the future. Enquiring whether the claimant is looking for work **at the moment** tends to inhibit talking about plans for work; asking whether they plan to (go back to) work **in the future** almost always opens up talk about work plans. Another advantage of this 'future' approach is that it can open up discussion of long-term goals, from which the adviser can introduce 'stepping stones' that may help the claimant to move along this trajectory.

Extended passages taken from the WFIs in Extracts 5.20 and 5.21 are presented in Extracts 5.22 and 5.23 to illustrate the contrast in the way that advisers are

constrained or enabled in their pursuit of work-related discussion, depending on the form of question that they use to open up talk about work plans. Extract 5.22 shows how the interaction in Extract 5.20 develops after the claimant has answered that she is **not** looking for work **at the moment** (line 9). The claimant goes on to explain how her childcare situation is the current barrier to work (lines 13-34); the adviser pursues a focus on work and manages to turn the talk towards training in the future. Nevertheless, the adviser only offers generalised information (see lines 49-51), which is unrelated to the claimant's particular circumstances. Having not elicited any information from the claimant about her future plans for work through the form of question chosen, the adviser is left without any specific details by which to tailor or elaborate on the information she provides.

Extract 5.22 [030] Initial WFI (Jul 07)

1 PA: .hhh Right. So- I mean: (0.3) .klh Ou (0.2) >Obviously
 2 you're looking for a place to live and that's your
 3 priority. and getting your money sorted is< your priority
 4 at the moment[:. >.hhh< I mean (0.1) wha- once all every-
 5 Cla: [Yeah
 6 PA: everything's settled down what are your plans:,
 7 What are you thinking you might do, >°*I mean*°< Are you
 8 looking for work[, at the m[oment.
 9 Cla: [>.hh< [No not at the (moment me)
 10 (0.3)
 11 PA: Rig[ht.
 12 Cla: [K-
 13 Cla: ((Name)) (.) s:he's only one 'n a half s[o
 14 PA: [Ri[ght.
 15 Cla: [Once
 16 she's in nurseries or som[ething ()
 17 PA: [.hh Yeah.
 18 (0.1)
 19 Cla: then probably y[eah.
 20 PA: [.hhh [So when she reaches about three.
 21 Cla: [.hhh
 22 Cla: Yeah. bec[uz n[obody'd mind her.
 23 PA: [Right. .hhh
 24 (0.2)
 25 PA: (hh)A[ll(hh)right(hh) huh heh a[(hh)nd you(hh) say(hheh)
 26 Cla: [hhuhh heh heh [.hhehh heh heh heh
 27 PA: that(hheh heh heh heh) [£Is she a terror,£ uh huh huh
 28 Cla: [£She's downstairs- Yeah she's- I
 29 couldn't bring 'er up her[e cuz she'd run riot.£
 30 PA: [heh heh
 31 hu[h heh .hhheh
 32 Cla: [£She's downstairs with me sister, s[he'll be pulling
 33 PA: [£Right.£
 34 Cla: her hair out, [£ heh heh
 35 PA: [£Right. .hh So she's a bit of a handful.£
 36 Cla: Yeah.=
 37 PA: =.t >So child care is an issue at the moment.=When she
 38 goes to nursery (0.5) () when you'd really
 39 start s[tart
 40 Cla: [Yeah

41 PA: thinking about looking for work.< Right that's- That's
42 fair enough. >.hh< As you know (.) basically >.hh< (0.2)
43 >when you're claiming income support< there is no
44 requirement (.) for you to look for work.
45 Cla: Ye[ah.
46 PA: [.hh- Ehm it's entirely up to you. >.fhh< We are here
47 (0.1) to help you (.) when you (.) want to take some
48 steps to moving back (.) towards work. >.hh< So- (0.1)
49 I'm sure y- (0.3) someone's gone through it all with you
50 before. but basically we help you find work and we help
51 you .hhh move into (0.1) training and further ed[ucation.
52 Cla: [Yeah.
53 (0.3)
54 PA: if that's- (0.2) >the step you wanna take to move
55 yourself towards work.<

By contrast, building on the claimant's affirmative response to *plans to go back to work in the future*, the adviser in Extract 5.23 (extending Extract 5.21) is able to focus her questions, and their discussion, on the claimant's specific plans and circumstances. They readily make progress towards focusing on what kind of work and the hours the claimant will be looking for. Moreover, they begin on a positive trajectory, which continues throughout. These findings are similar to, and support, those by McKenna *et al.* (2005), who comment that:

'Customer responses to these questions were key in influencing the focus of subsequent discussions in the WFI. Where customers responded positively to a PA's initial questions about work, a range of topics were then covered. For other customers who stated that work was not an option, discussions focused on training or other support available through Jobcentre Plus.'

(p. 74)

Extract 5.23 [087] Initial WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: Okay. Right. Noww- (0.7) one of the key things we, we
2 talk about in these interviews is what your future plans
3 are with regards to work especially. And have you worked
4 before?
5 Cla: Just as a training hairdresser
6 PA: Right, okay. And have you got any plans to go back to
7 work in the, the future?
8 Cla: I was thinking about going back to college when
9 (daughter's name) started school next September
10 PA: Right
11 Cla: To finish me college course
12 PA: Excellent, right. So was that a hairdressing course that
13 you were doing at college?
14 Cla: Yeah
15 PA: Yeah. To a NVQ level t- one or two?
16 Cla: Er I've completed two a- so just three now
17 PA: So you wanted to do three. So you'd be looking for
18 somewhere to get a placement to do that as well, or an
19 employer to take you on to put you through
20 Cla: Yeah

21 PA: Right (4.7) She's yeah, co- she'll be starting school
 22 in September oh-eight. Okay. Right. Smashing. Right, make
 23 sure we've got all that information in here. Right, so.
 24 Are you looking for part time work when you eventually go
 25 back once you've done your course or
 26 Cla: Er probably part time when I=
 27 PA: =Right, okay. So would you be looking for something
 28 around school hours when you actually go(ing) back to
 29 work?

5.5.4 Do review WFIs build on initial interviews?

At review WFIs, advisers may already have information about the claimant's work history and future aspirations, recorded during previous interviews. This may be used as a basis for initiating work-focused discussion, as in the following examples (see also Extract 5.25, lines 8-10).

So I know last- last time w's- (.) I saw you: were thinking about maybe doing something with Su:re Sta:rt jus:t you know things for yourself to be doing [092; Review]

Now when we (.) you came in before erm (.) we talked about the type of wo:rk you'd done befo:re and and you said you've only sort of had a Saturday job as a hairdresser? .hhh or in a hairdresser's and no other work is that still the case? [114; Review]

However, in our sample, it was rare for advisers to refer to or use information gained in previous WFIs about claimants' work plans. More commonly, if advisers referred to the claimant's record, they simply sought confirmation of facts such as contact details or names of previous employers. In many review interviews, no substantive reference at all was made to previous WFIs, and advisers asked the same work-related questions as in initial interviews. In the following example, the claimant draws attention to this repetitive questioning (line 11).

Extract 5.24 [169] Review WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: Right. What, what type of work is it that you've previously
 2 done?
 3 Cla: I used to do babysitting, childminding.
 4 PA: Have you had paid employment?
 5 Cla: No, it's all been voluntary you see, so.
 6 PA: Okay. And what did you do on your YTS?
 7 Cla: I worked at a school.
 8 PA: Doing, doing what?
 9 Cla: Um teaching assistant, non-teaching assistant.
 10 PA: Okay.
 11 Cla: I told her all this last time. ((laughs))
 12 PA: Well we'll make sure we've got it this time.

By building on previously obtained information, advisers can avoid this sense of unnecessary repetition; they can also use the information as a basis for initiating work-focused discussion that is tailored to the individual.

5.5.5 Pursuing claimants' work plans

The data indicate that advisers generally **do** follow up claimants' work plans, even when, as in Extract 5.22, they have indicated that they are not actively looking for work. However, not all strategies for doing so seem equally effective. In particular, giving generalised and standardised information about services provided by Jobcentre Plus does not appear to engage claimants in discussion or prompt them to volunteer information about their work plans. For example, in Extract 5.25, the adviser clearly pursues the matter of work and training in preparation for work, and delivers relevant information about financial support available during training. Moreover, there are aspects of this information that are 'personalised' (e.g. references in lines 38/39 to Maths and English). However, overall the information given in lines 18-33 about training and financial support remains at a rather generalised level, and is not tailored to the claimant's individual needs – for the simple reason that they have not yet ascertained the kind of work that the claimant would like to do. Enquiring 'Do you know the type of work that you'd like to do?' does not (because it is a yes/no question) leave much room for manoeuvre when the claimant replies that she does not know; a more open question such as '*What sort of work would you like to do?*' would create the opportunity, even if the claimant were unsure (e.g. '*I don't really know*'), to follow up and discuss further the type of work that might interest the claimant. That would, in turn, have enabled the adviser to give information about relevant training, information tailored to the claimant's work preferences. The difficulty that the adviser encounters here is really to engage the claimant in training possibilities (note the claimant's minimal responses at lines 20, 26, 37 and 43), in part because she has not been able to generate discussion of a back-to-work trajectory – which leaves the adviser unable also to tailor information about training to the claimant's needs.

Extract 5.25 [114] Review WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: Okay .hh do you have any qualifications at a:ll
2 Cla: No
3 PA: No okay .hh and (0.6) you don't want to look for work at
4 the mo[ment is that right
5 Cla: [.hhh no not yet
6 PA: And when you do go back to work do you know (.) the type
7 of work that you'd like to do?
8 (0.4)
9 Cla: N[:o not yet
10 PA: [N:o ok-
11 PA: Okay .hh have you thought about gaining any qualifications
12 [at all?
13 Cla: [well I th- (0.6) I think I would have to go to college
14 first [you know to (2.0) learn something
15 PA: [Mm
16 PA: °M-° okay and (you've) no idea what you'[d like to do
17 Cla: [N::o

18 PA: .hh Okay erm (1.5) so there's lot of options available to
 19 you (0.4) you ca:n earn twenty pounds a week [without it
 20 Cla: [Ri::ght
 21 PA: affecting your Income Support so you could stay on Income
 22 Support earn twenty pounds a week
 23 Cla: Ri:ght
 24 PA: Erm and still get all your housing costs and everything
 25 paid for yo[u
 26 Cla: [Okay
 27 PA: Alright? .hh if you worked under sixteen hours then we
 28 would pay for your childcare costs for you?
 ((lines omitted during which PA explains further about help with childcare costs))
 29 PA: .hh and when you're ready and in a position to look for
 30 work then we can erm
 31 Cla: °Help me°
 32 PA: help you find th- (0.2) and give you a list of all the
 33 childcare providers that are available to you .hhh I mean
 34 (.) the option (0.8) other option available to you no:w if
 35 you wanted to you could always go: back to college and .hh
 36 get your maths and Engli[sh or
 37 Cla: [Ri::ght
 38 PA: we employ provi:ders that are able to help with maths and
 39 English if that's what you wanted to do?
 40 (0.2)
 41 PA: .hh I mean it's n- in- I'm gonna be led by you=it's
 42 entirely [up to you
 43 Cla: [Ri::ght
 44 PA: if you want to do something now then you ca:n
 45 Cla: .h I think it's a bit hectic at the mo[ment
 46 PA: [Okay
 47 (0.6)
 48 PA: So you just want to lea:ve it until a bit later on
 49 Cla: [y::eah

Notice also that the adviser uses negative formulations (*You don't want to look for work...* and *You've no idea what you'd like to do..*) of the claimant's work plans, or formulations that simply accept and consolidate the claimant's disinclination to look for work (*So you just want to leave it...*).

In contrast to such negative formulations and the rather standardised delivery of information in Extract 5.25, three apparent strategies that may enable advisers more effectively to engage claimants in considering work-related options are to:

- create opportunities or 'openings' for claimants to discuss employment, for instance by asking about previous work experience or plans for the future, in an 'open' fashion;
- explore relevant **steps towards** work;
- provide positive and constructive formulations of what claimants say.

These strategies, which we suggest are elements of more effective practice, are illustrated in Extract 5.26.

Extract 5.26 [092] Review WFI (Oct 07)

1 PA: .hhh RIGHT: SO: h. eh::m:: .t what about work then: what's:
2 the situation ther:e [(the) possibilities or

3 Cla: [Er: (0.2) when (.) er- hopefully w-
4 obviously when she starts nursery I'll start

5 PA: Mhm

6 Cla: But at- at the minute (it's) not- (.) (it's) not a chance
7 because ((child's name)) i- only in nursery at the minute
((32 lines omitted))

8 PA: .hhh Eh:m: (0.3) right so: (.) the only thing I:'d look at
9 with you then is:: ehm: long-term you were sayin:g you
10 wanted to [look at (0.2) care assistant

11 Cla: [I'm definitely gonna go back to- yeah [yeah

12 PA: [Yeah

13 (0.4)

14 Cla: [Yeah

15 PA: [Right

16 (0.2)

17 PA: .hhh Ehm: (0.6) so (0.5) what we'd normally look at is::
18 (0.5) is there anything you can be doing in the meantime
19 (0.3) to get yourself prepa:red for that so that .h you
20 know when the time's right you've got [the best chanc::e of

21 Cla: [Yeah

22 PA: [getting the sort [of work you want to do

23 Cla: [(No) because I'd-[I'd- I'd know how to do it in any case
24 can't wai[t to go back to wo:rk .h[h I mean

25 PA: [Mhm [Yeah

26 (0.2)

27 Cla: I'd- (.) I fell pregnant with (.) ((child's name)) and
28 I didn't mean to I was on the injection so it's: not
29 .hh[h I just (don't feel) as long as she's: (.) still

30 PA: [Mhm

31 Cla: settling (0.2) she'll go with someone I will

32 [get a job cos I can't- I can't be doing with sitting in

33 PA: [Yeah

34 Cla: the house all the [time ((laughs))

35 PA: [((laughs)) .hhh have you done care work
36 before

37 (0.2)

38 Cla: No: I've always done factory wor:k

39 PA: Right

40 (0.2)

41 PA: [(Right)

42 Cla: [But I don't wanna go back into factory work (now)
43 especially [now that I've got kids and I want sommit

44 PA: [N:o:

45 Cla: [with obviously suitable hours

46 PA: [Well

((58 lines omitted, including PA taking a call))

47 PA: With the care work I mean (you d-) it's totally up to you
48 but what I would say is: in- (1.2) (they're-) (0.9) all
49 care homes hav:e (.) targets for how many people they
50 have (.) put through NVQ[s (0.6) er:m: (0.3) now (0.7)

51 Cla: [Mhm

52 PA: up until very re:cently nearly every advert for care work
53 (0.3) was offering training (0.6) Now they're starting to
54 go towar:ds: (0.3) NVQ preferred

55 (0.6)

56 PA: So if they can get someone who's already been trained
 57 in other words they'll take them on first...

Creating work-related openings: The claimant's initial response about work plans is negative (*at the minute not a chance*, line 6). In manoeuvring around this potential 'block', the adviser employs what she has previously learned about the claimant's work aspirations, to provide an opening to discuss plans for the future ('long term', line 9). The adviser in Extract 5.23 similarly provides such an opening, by asking about the claimant's previous work experience. This approach may elicit a more positive response regarding work (e.g. in Extract 5.26, the claimant responds *I'm definitely gonna go back*, line 11). In other words, instead of beginning by asking directly about work plans, a more effective technique would be to lead into work-related issues by asking about previous work experience, claimants' longer-term career aspirations and so forth.

Pursuing steps towards work: From that more positive response, the adviser then works 'backwards' from those aspirations to help the claimant consider what needs to be in place in order to apply for positions in her chosen career. The adviser suggests some 'stepping stones' towards achieving her job goal. This strategy, combined with the BOC and the information the adviser gives about childcare benefits, recruits the claimant at least as far as considering starting a college course soon, if she can find suitable childcare. Throughout this extract, the adviser focuses on training as a step towards the claimant's career aspiration.

Positive and constructive formulations: The claimant's initial response in Extract 5.26 to the adviser's enquiry about work was, as we have seen, **negative**. Subsequently, the adviser **reformulates** the claimant's position more positively, by switching from her current lack of interest in finding work to her longer-term goals: *long-term you were saying you wanted to look at care assistant* (lines 9-10). This gives a more positive 'spin' to the claimant's position – positive insofar as the adviser's reformulation focuses on what work the claimant **does** want to do. In the more successful WFIs – i.e. those in which claimants are caseloaded, or there is at least some 'turnaround' in a claimant's willingness to consider work or work-related activities – advisers frequently formulate what claimants have said in a positive light.

These three strategies are evident in WFIs which are relatively successful in encouraging claimants to consider moving forward their career plans, for instance by looking into starting relevant training programmes in preparation for going back to work, or even recruiting claimant onto relevant programmes (including NDLP).

5.6 Caseloading

Key points

- In only five of our total sample of 38 initial and review WFIs were claimants caseloaded.
- There was considerable variability in PAs' efforts to caseload claimants.
- Explicit invitations to join a caseload were relatively rare.
- More commonly, advisers provided information about NDLP so that claimants could consider joining their caseload in the future.
- The 'information only' approach risks missing opportunities to caseload as it relies on claimants taking the initiative.
- Explicit invitations open up a slot, there and then, for claimants to consider joining the caseload.
- Greater use of explicit invitations may help more claimants to access the comprehensive package of support available through NDLP.
- Advisers might benefit from clearer guidelines on which claimants to target for NDLP participation.

5.6.1 Infrequency of caseloading

There is strong evidence that mandatory lone parent WFIs have been successful in increasing entries to NDLP, reaching lone parents who would not otherwise have accessed the programme (Thomas, 2007). This is important because *although it is possible for a lone parent to go into employment directly from a lone parent WFI, the more usual route is via NDLP* (Thomas, 2007: 16). Nevertheless, only about seven per cent of eligible lone parents join NDLP (Cebulla and Flore, with Greenberg, 2008). Reasons for non-participation are multiple and interlinked, but include a lack of awareness of NDLP, partly related to advisers' reluctance to invite claimants explicitly to participate (Brown and Joyce, 2007). Although the impact of this cannot be quantified, and advisers have cautioned against assuming that participation would necessarily increase in line with awareness, there is evidence from interviews with lone parents that some would have been interested in NDLP had they been invited (*ibid.*).

In our sample, active caseloading of claimants was uncommon in both the initial and review WFIs. Just two (of 17) claimants explicitly agreed to join an adviser's caseload during their initial interview. Similarly, only three (of 21) were caseloaded during the review interviews we recorded.

Of course, caseloading will not be appropriate for every claimant. Some claimants in our sample were not currently in a position to consider work due to significant health difficulties or caring responsibilities (beyond regular childcare), while others had already found work. However, good practice by advisers in districts

that perform highly with respect to entries to NDLP has previously been found to include *'making a positive initial assumption that all customers will want to "opt in" to NDLP'* (Thomas, 2007: 50). Our research suggests that advisers still tend more towards the opposite assumption. Inadvertently, the effect can be to diminish claimant choice, as in the following example, where the claimant's preferences are assumed rather than explored.

Extract 5.27 [030] Initial WFI (Jul 07)

1 PA: I'll give you this leaflet, (0.1) basically (0.8) it's a- a
 2 list (0.2) of all the things we can help with here. Now-
 3 (.) if you'd sat there today and said oh I'm looking for
 4 work or I want to go to training I would have recommended
 5 quite strongly that you kind of start seeing us on a more
 6 regular basis. Ehm (0.1) bu- (0.1) at the moment probably I
 7 don't think that's probably what (0.1) you would w[ant to
 8 Cla: [Mm
 9 PA: do. Based on what you've told me. So I'll just give you
 10 this and it's got our contact number on the bottom so (0.1)
 11 if the situation changes, (0.1) then (.) you know just give
 12 us a bell and we ca[n arrange to see ya
 13 Cla: [Yeah

Greater use of explicit enquiries about whether claimants wish to join the caseload could help more claimants to access the comprehensive package of support available through the New Deal (see Section 5.6.3).

5.6.2 Variability in practice

There was considerable variability in advisers' efforts to caseload claimants, irrespective of their circumstances. For example, in some cases advisers assumed from the outset of the WFI – before obtaining any personal information from the claimant – that they would not be seen until the next review. In others, advisers placed the option of caseloading explicitly on the agenda from the start.

There also appeared to be some variability regarding whether advisers treated a claimant as having been 'caseloaded'. For example, two claimants agreed (during their initial WFI) to return for a further interview before the due date of their next review. However, the advisers gave no indication, either during the WFI, or in discussion with the researcher afterwards, that they considered these claimants to have joined their caseload. To some extent, this variability in approaches to caseloading appears to be related to particular Jobcentre Plus offices, but individual advisers also varied in their approach.

Advisers typically spoke very positively to claimants about what Jobcentre Plus has to offer lone parents, emphasising that *there is a lot of help available* [139; Initial], and almost always giving some information about the services provided. However, the amount of information given varied considerably, ranging from detailed discussion of the financial and practical help available, to a brief mention of 'help

and support' that could be accessed in the future. Although it was common for advisers to provide details of the financial help available post-employment (e.g. the Adviser Discretionary Fund, the Job Grant, four weeks' run-on of Housing Benefit), they were less likely to explain in detail about assistance leading up to job readiness (e.g. developing a CV, filling in application forms, interview techniques).

5.6.3 'Informing' versus 'inviting': two strategies for talking about caseloading

What, and how, information regarding caseloading is given to claimants does not seem to be key to whether they agree to join an adviser's caseload. Rather, the crucial interactional factor seems to be whether the adviser uses an 'information only' approach or actively invites the claimant to take part. In our sample, the information only approach was common, with advisers typically treating NDLP as something for the future, rather than something the claimant might choose to join there and then:

Extract 5.28 [003] Review WFI (Jul 07)

1 PA: Ehm: I mean you can come back and see me anytime you need
2 to so- .Hhh (0.1) if you get in:to the stage where you
3 think >well I'm just about ready to actually start applying
4 for jobs:< .hhh then obviously come back and see me

Although PAs regularly informed claimants that they were free to make an appointment at any time, only seven (out of 38) were explicitly asked if they would like to come in more regularly. The following examples, involving different advisers from the same Jobcentre Plus office are illustrative. Both are review WFIs. Both claimants are attending college and interested in acquiring the skills for office work and both have indicated a willingness to work. Both advisers provide information about NDLP. However, in Extract 5.29, the adviser **only** informs the claimant about the support available, treating the programme as something she **might** wish to access in the future.

Extract 5.29 [163] Review WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: No::w I appreciate that you're at college at the present
2 time hh. (2.0) so: but we do have- (0.6) just assuming
3 that you when you finish your course (1.0) just say you
4 wanted a hand in like looking for work
5 Cla: Uhuh
6 PA: We do have something called the ((name of Centre)) down
7 near the ((location))
8 (0.8)
9 PA: Now
10 Cla: Oh yeah I've been on that before
11 PA: Have you
12 Cla: Yea:h (0.4) you have to send loads of CVs off and all
13 that lo[t
14 PA: [Yeah

15 2.8)
 16 PA: But there's also there's also um ((provider name)) and
 17 the ((provider name))
 18 Cla: Yeah
 19 PA: And we also do (0.8) what they call work trials so if you
 20 finish your course and and were struggling to get a job
 21 we could we could try and get an office for you where
 22 you- they would take you on trial
 23 Cla: O:kay

By contrast, in Extract 5.30 the adviser informs the claimant **and** enquires whether she would like to join her caseload immediately. The claimant agrees to this.

Extract 5.30 [172] Review WFI (Jan 08)

1 PA: Ha- how- how would you feel at this moment in time
 2 ((claimant name)) me sort of helping you find [(.) the
 3 (Cus): [(Mm)
 4 PA: right type of job to match your circumstances now by you
 5 being put on my caseload
 6 Cla: Well I d- I- [I do
 7 PA: [Would you=
 8 Cla: =Yeah=
 9 PA: =Would you like that
 10 Cla: Yeah
 11 PA: Would you want that help [and support
 12 Cla: [Yeah, yeah
 13 PA: So obviously I- I would take into consideration
 14 [everything you're saying [about you're committed
 15 Cla: [Mm [Yeah
 16 PA: [to this, this da::y [you can only work=
 17 Cla: [Yeah [Yeah
 18 PA: =so many ho[urs
 19 Cla: [Yeah
 20 PA: But I would, you know, try my best and look at all the
 21 vacancies that come each day to [the Jobcentre
 22 Cla: [Yeah
 23 PA: and try and match your circumstances to the
 24 vacanc[ies
 25 Cla: [Yeah, that's fine, [yeah
 26 PA: [So do y- do you feel you
 27 would, you'd want to participate on tha:[t
 28 Cla: [Yeah, I
 29 do, I am- I am ready=
 30 PA: =Yeah?=
 31 Cla: =Cos like I says, I've got more confidence (when I'm) doing
 32 these courses so=
 33 PA: =Yeah
 34 Cla: I am ready for [work
 35 PA: [Okay .hhh
 36 Cla: I mean I've been ready for a bit so=
 37 PA: =Good, [good
 38 Cla: [I do
 39 PA: What I'd like to do then ((claimant name)) is I'd like to
 40 Cla: Mm

41 PA: book another appoint[ment]
42 Cla: [Yeah
43 PA: so that we can take it a stage further an- and start and
44 look at vacancies But also I'd like to discuss with you
45 what training courses we have as well here through the Job
46 Centre...

The information only approach runs a clear risk: missed opportunities to caseload. Because it relies on claimants taking the initiative to get in touch in the future, even those who might respond positively to NDLP may not participate for reasons that could be overcome by means of an explicit invitation (e.g. forgetting what is on offer, anxiety about contacting Jobcentre Plus, lack of motivation). In our sample, claimants were only caseloaded at those interviews where the adviser explicitly asked the claimant if they wanted to attend more regular interviews.

5.6.4 Retaining a 'light touch'

Previous research has indicated that advisers often avoid explicitly mentioning NDLP for a range of reasons, including the possibility that its association with other mandatory New Deal programmes could be off-putting and hence damaging to the adviser-claimant relationship (Brown and Joyce, 2007). However, in inviting a claimant to join the caseload, there is no need to refer explicitly to NDLP, or even to use the term 'caseload'. For instance, in our sample, some advisers explained aspects of NDLP without naming the programme, but simply by asking claimants if they wanted to come in more regularly for further help.

Advisers can also still use their preferred 'light touch' (Brown and Joyce, 2007), remaining sensitive to claimants' preferences. The point is to open up a slot for claimants to consider participation, not to pressure them into taking part. Invitations (or other forms of enquiry about caseloading) create this slot. Information provision alone does not. For example, in Extract 5.31, the adviser first provides information about caseloading and then later explicitly asks if the claimant wants to join the caseload. The claimant's responses are highlighted. From lines 1-29, when the adviser is taking an information only approach, the claimant simply acknowledges the information. It is only when the adviser later asks if she would like to come in more regularly (lines 30-32) that the claimant announces a clear decision: she wants to look for work on her own (line 33), which the adviser accepts without any pressure to reconsider.

Extract 5.31 Initial WFI [031]

1 PA: What we do sometimes if y- if you're looking for work and
2 you're ready for work you can join: our caseload. hh so:
3 you can see us regularly or you [can keep in touch with
4 Cla: [Yeah
5 PA: us by phone (.) () advisor by phone [to kind
6 Cla: [Yeah
7 PA: of .hhh you know .hh [we'll look for work for you:
8 Cla: [Yeah
9 (.)
10 Cla: M[m
11 PA: [You'll look for work for yourself obviously but we'll
12 look for work for you and we'll let you know if we find
13 out about any[thing you might be
14 Cla: [Yeah
15 PA: interested s[o you: can do that
16 Cla: [Okay
17 PA: .hhh
18 Cla: Yeah
19 (.)
20 PA: If you choose not to do that that's fine it's enti:rely
21 up to you
22 Cla: Yeah=
23 PA: =But (0.2) you know (.) obviously (0.4) you know (.)
24 we're here
25 (.)
26 PA: [So you've [got a number there (0.2) where you
27 Cla: [Yeah [Okay
28 PA: c[ould ring us .hhhh [yeah
29 Cla: [Oh that's it is it [yeah
((lines omitted))
30 PA: And it- (.) I don- what do you want to do: d'y- would
31 (0.2) d'you want to actually join us and see us
32 regul[arly or
33 Cla: [I would like to look f:- (0.6) on my own hh.
34 PA: That's [fi:ne
35 Cla: [Is that okay [((laughs))
36 PA: [Absolutely there's no compunction
37 at all [.hh er:m as I say if- if you:
38 Cla: [Yeah:
39 PA: .h want to contact us that contact number's the[re
40 Cla: [I've
41 PA: [so: that would
42 Cla: [got their number there yeah=
43 PA: =be (.) [all you would need to do
44 Cla: [Yeah

5.6.5 Effective practice in caseloading

Effective practice when advisers consider that claimants might appropriately be caseloaded is to avoid an information only approach. Instead, advisers should combine information provision with an explicit invitation to claimants to consider participation in NDLP (although the programme itself need not be named).

The question remains whether advisers should *'target the full spectrum of lone parents, or simply focus on those who have the desire to return to work in order to maximize resources'* (Brown and Joyce, 2007: 44). The variability in practice in our sample suggests that advisers themselves may be unsure for whom NDLP is intended, particularly given the range of other providers to whom claimants might be referred. Focus groups with advisers have found similar inconsistency in how advisers define and record participation on NDLP (Brown and Joyce, 2007).

5.7 Summary of findings and effective practice

Our approach to assessing the effectiveness of adviser practices and thereby identifying effective practice in WFIs is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. However, broadly speaking, in identifying effective practice in lone parent WFIs our methodology has included 'matching' and comparing the outcomes of WFIs with claimants who are similarly 'positioned' in some fashion.

Adopting this comparative methodology as far as was possible, and focusing on cases in which WFIs were effective in recruiting claimants onto relevant programmes or turning around in some significant way their preparedness to consider work-related activities, we have identified the following techniques which seem to be more effective either in recruiting (e.g. caseloading) claimants, or in succeeding in interesting them in thinking about taking steps towards work.

- Explanations of BOCs should be framed around **how they might help claimants**, and relate to their particular circumstances (and not as something we have to do).
- Information about programmes, assistance and benefits available, should, wherever possible, be **tailored** to what the claimant has said about their circumstances. Giving information in a generalised or standardised manner (as a list of what's on offer) is relatively ineffective (indeed tends to be done only when claimants have indicated they are not actively seeking work, or have not been interested in caseloading or other programmes). Claimants **respond more positively to information that relates or is fitted to their work aspirations, or childcare needs, for example.**

- Advisers should not rely on a single question to find out about, for example (and especially) claimants' circumstances and needs regarding childcare. Claimants' answers to an initial enquiry may not fully or accurately reflect their circumstances or childcare needs. If from claimants' initial responses it seems they may not need childcare, advisers should nevertheless **continue to explore this issue, and attempt to 'unpack' a claimant's true situation**. It sometimes happens that claimants do after all have childcare issues and needs, that were not evident in their initial responses, and that might be resolved by benefits and other provision.
- Enquiries about claimants' work plans should, wherever possible, be **framed around the future** (rather than whether claimants are looking for work at the present).
- Wherever possible, advisers should explore with claimants their work plans, goals and aspirations for the future – and encourage claimants to consider work not simply as something that is 18 months or two years away, but as something for which claimants may need to prepare themselves, even if they are not yet ready for work; i.e. advisers should discuss with **claimants their steps towards work**. Thus, claimants should be encouraged to consider a trajectory towards work (rather than '*Ready for work? Yes or no?*').
- The ways in which advisers ask about claimants' work intentions, and discuss these with them, should **encourage work-related openings** – that is, opportunities to discuss work plans for the future, and steps to be taken towards those plans. Even if claimants indicate to begin with that they are not actively seeking work, it is possible to move the discussion on to goals and aspirations for the future, and then consider what training and other preparation might be necessary to achieve those goals.
- By using **positive and constructive reformulations** of claimants' rather negative views about their interest in and likelihood of finding work, advisers can open up opportunities to discuss future work plans (work-related openings).
- When advisers consider that claimants might appropriately be caseloaded, they should avoid an information only approach. Instead, they should combine information provision with **an explicit invitation** to claimants to consider participation in NDLP (although the programme itself need not be named).

6 A comparison of Work Focused Interviews in Jobcentre Plus and Employment Zone offices

6.1 Background to New Deal and Employment Zones

In April 2000, externally contracted Employment Zones (EZs) were introduced in 15 areas of the UK experiencing high levels of long-term unemployment (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006). Initially, EZs were aimed at those aged 25 and over who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for at least 12 months (or, in some areas, for at least 18 months). They were then expanded in 2003 to target other groups as well, including lone parents claiming Income Support (IS). Some EZs have dedicated lone parent advisers and/or offices – as was the case for the EZ in which the present lone parent data were collected – while others offer an integrated service, with the same advisers dealing with all claimant groups and ages (*ibid.*). In some parts of the country, a single provider is contracted to deliver the EZ services. In the largest EZs, multiple contracted providers were introduced in 2004, creating a degree of competition (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Before April 2007, however, mandatory claimants were unable to choose between providers; rather, they were randomly assigned by Jobcentre Plus advisers by means of a Random Allocation Tool (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007; for a review and assessment of more recent developments, see Bellis *et al.*, 2009).

New Deal 25+ (ND25+) is a mandatory programme for those who have been claiming JSA for 18 of the previous 21 months. During a 'gateway period' of up to 16 weeks, claimants receive intensive support from a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser (PA). If they do not find work during this time, claimants may access a number of other options '*including subsidised employment, full-time education and training, voluntary activity or environmental work experience, which are externally contracted/provided*' (Adams and Carter, 2008: 15). In those parts of the country where EZs have been set up, ND25+ is replaced by EZ provision.

This is more flexible than ND25+ because EZ providers have fewer restrictions on their activities, allowing them to tailor their interventions to a greater extent than is possible in Jobcentre Plus (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007). However, it should be noted that the New Deal programme itself comprises a mix of Jobcentre Plus and contracted provision by the private and voluntary sector. Attendance at the EZ is mandatory for those JSA claimants aged 25 or above who have been unemployed for 18 months. Voluntary early entry onto either the ND25+ or the EZ programme is allowed for those claimants with additional barriers to employment; once they have joined the EZ, however, participation becomes mandatory (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007).

New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is a voluntary programme, which forms part of the Government's 'Welfare to Work' agenda, introduced in July 1997 (Brown and Joyce, 2007). The aim is to improve lone parents' standard of living by helping them to move into paid work or increase their number of working hours. Participation involves joining an adviser's caseload in order to receive regular individualised support, *'including face-to-face voluntary meetings where appropriate...[and] access to a wide range of advice, support, incentives and transitional and in-work benefits'* (Thomas, 2007: 16). In some parts of the country, EZs offer an alternative to NDLP. At the initial WFI, lone parent claimants should be offered the opportunity to join NDLP (except in London, where only EZ provision is available); then at the mandatory six month review WFI, lone parent claimants should be asked if they would like a referral to the EZ (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006). They can also ask their Jobcentre Plus adviser for a referral at any time or they may self-refer. EZs often hold 'outreach' sessions in the community, whereby they advertise their services to potential claimants (Hirst *et al.*, 2006; Policy Research Institute, 2006). They may also be referred (or self-refer) to other private providers, such as Action Teams for Jobs, but they cannot join more than one private provider at a time or participate in NDLP and attend the EZ at the same time (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006). In some areas this has created a degree of competition for lone parent claimants, although collaboration between providers has been achieved in many.

This chapter reports findings from our comparison between Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) held in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices, for two claimant groups:

- JSA claimants aged 25 and above, who have entered the Jobcentre Plus ND25+ or its EZ equivalent;
- lone parents³⁴ claiming IS who have entered the Jobcentre Plus NDLP or its EZ equivalent.

6.2 Aim of the comparison

We were asked by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to compare WFIs in the public and private sector, because there is some evidence from employment-impact studies that EZs are consistently more successful than comparative Jobcentre

³⁴ For simplicity, we use the term **lone parents** throughout this report, although lone parent claimants are referred to as **single parents** in the EZ.

Plus New Deal programmes with respect both to immediate and sustained job outcomes (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007).³⁵ The aim of this comparison is, therefore, to identify any differences there might be in the ways in which WFIs are conducted in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices – differences that might contribute to the success EZ providers have in placing claimants in work, through an enhanced effectiveness of EZ WFIs.

It is important to recognise, however, that this is not a direct, like-for-like comparison. There are important differences between Jobcentre Plus and EZs, including the tight regulatory environment in which Jobcentre Plus staff operate, and the fact that they are part of the welfare benefits process. Factors such as Jobcentre Plus advisers’ ability to impose sanctions can create tensions in the adviser-claimant relationship, with which advisers in the private sector do not have to contend (National Audit Office, 2006). As we will emphasise, there are also organisational differences that may account for some of the differences in how advisers manage the interview. Nevertheless, in both the public and private sector, one-to-one interviews are considered key to helping claimants (back) into work. Identifying effective communication strategies, which advisers in either sector may be able to use in their day-to-day work with claimants, is therefore the central aim of the present analysis.

6.3 Overview of the Jobcentre Plus-EZ comparative subsample

The comparison reported here is based on a sample of 88 recorded WFIs, including 48 from Jobcentre Plus offices and 40 from EZs. Of the Jobcentre Plus interviews, 21 were conducted with ND25+ claimants, by four advisers; and 27 with NDLP claimants, by nine advisers. Of the EZ interviews, 20 were conducted with 25+ claimants, by eight advisers; and 20 with lone parent claimants, by five advisers. Table 6.1 shows the breakdown by office and WFI type.

Table 6.1 Jobcentre Plus-EZ comparative subsample

| Jobcentre Plus offices | | Employment Zones | |
|------------------------|----|------------------------|----|
| Initial JSA ND25+ | 4 | Initial JSA 25+ | 7 |
| Subsequent JSA ND25+ | 17 | Subsequent JSA 25+ | 13 |
| Total | 21 | Total | 20 |
| Initial NDLP | 12 | Initial lone parent | 9 |
| Subsequent NDLP | 15 | Subsequent lone parent | 11 |
| Total | 27 | Total | 20 |

Table 6.2 shows a breakdown of the characteristics of this comparative subsample for the 25+ claimants. As this table shows, around 80 per cent (17 claimants)

³⁵ Although it should be noted that there is some evidence that EZ provision costs more than Jobcentre Plus provision (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007).

of the Jobcentre Plus ND25+ sample had previously made a claim to benefit, as had 70 per cent (14 claimants) of the EZ 25+ sample. Of these, 14 Jobcentre Plus claimants had previously claimed JSA, one had claimed JSA and Incapacity Benefit (IB), and for two, the type of claim was unknown. Of the EZ sample, ten had previously claimed JSA, two had claimed JSA and IB, and two had claimed carer's allowance; one had not claimed before, but did have previous experience of another private provider.

Table 6.2 Characteristics of the Jobcentre Plus-EZ comparative subsample: JSA 25+ claimants

| Characteristic | Jobcentre Plus offices | | | EZ offices | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|-------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| | Initial ND25+ WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent ND25+ WFIs No. of claimants | Total | Initial 25+ WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent 25+ WFIs No. of claimants | Total |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Female | 0 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Male | 4 | 12 | 16 | 5 | 9 | 14 |
| Age | | | | | | |
| 20s | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 30s | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| 40s | 2 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 50s | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | | |
| White British | 3 | 17 | 20 | 7 | 11 | 18 |
| Indian | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Asian | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Mixed White/Asian | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Previous claims? | | | | | | |
| Yes | 2 | 15 | 17 | 4 | 10 | 14 |
| No | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Time on current benefit | | | | | | |
| 0-1 year | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| >1 year-5 years | 3 | 11 | 14 | 5 | 10 | 15 |
| >5 years-10 years | 1 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| >10 years | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Number of previous times claimant has seen this adviser | | | | | | |
| 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| 1-5 | 0 | 12 | 12 | 1 | 8 | 9 |
| 6-10 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 10-20 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| >20 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

Table 6.3 shows a breakdown of the characteristics of this comparative subsample for lone parents. As this table shows, around 55 per cent (15 claimants) of the Jobcentre Plus NDLP sample had previously made a claim to benefit, as had 40 per cent (eight claimants) of the EZ lone parent sample. Of these, 12 Jobcentre Plus claimants had previously claimed IS, two had claimed JSA, and one had claimed IB. Of the EZ sample, seven had claimed IS and for one, the type of previous claim was unknown.

Table 6.3 Characteristics of the Jobcentre Plus-EZ comparative subsample: lone parents

| Characteristic | Jobcentre Plus offices | | | EZ offices | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------|--|---|-------|
| | Initial NDLP WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent NDLP WFIs No. of claimants | Total | Initial lone parent WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent lone parent WFIs No. of claimants | Total |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Female | 12 | 14 | 26 | 9 | 11 | 20 |
| Male | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Age | | | | | | |
| Teens | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20s | 4 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| 30s | 4 | 10 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 40s | 3 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | | |
| White British | 12 | 15 | 27 | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| Black British | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Black African | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Previous claims? | | | | | | |
| Yes | 5 | 10 | 15 | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| No | 7 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Unknown/unsure | 0 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Time on current benefit | | | | | | |
| 0-1 year ¹ | 9 | 6 | 15 | 4 | 9 | 13 |
| >1 year-5 years | 1 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| >5 years-10 years | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| >10 years | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Unknown | 1 ² | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

Continued

Table 6.3 Continued

| Characteristic | Jobcentre Plus offices | | | EZ offices | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------|--|---|-------|
| | Initial NDLP WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent NDLP WFIs No. of claimants | Total | Initial Lone parent WFIs No. of claimants | Subsequent Lone parent WFIs No. of claimants | Total |
| Number of previous times claimant has seen this adviser | | | | | | |
| 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 ³ | 0 | 8 |
| 1-5 | 9 | 10 | 19 | 1 | 8 | 9 |
| 6-10 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 10-20 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Unknown | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

¹ Including three whose claims were not yet processed and one who was not claiming benefit at the time of the interview.

² Has been claiming off and on over the last 16 years.

³ At least two of these claimants had met the PA before when booking their first appointment.

6.4 Differences in organisational practices and style

6.4.1 Introduction

Judging from the recordings in our sample, EZ WFIs tend to have a different ‘feel’ to Jobcentre Plus WFIs, a different interactional style. In this chapter, we ‘unpack’ this general observation to demonstrate some important differences in the **advisory style** that PAs tend to adopt in the EZ compared with Jobcentre Plus. In line with the overall aim of this research project, the chapter focuses on the interaction between advisers and claimants during real-life (recorded) interviews. However, this is not to suggest that the differences observed are entirely attributable to the individual advisers; organisational differences in policy or practice – such as different funding policies and targets, and even the provision of free tea and coffee and a children’s play area in the EZ lone parent office – are likely to play an important part.

Before describing specific aspects of advisory style (see Section 6.5), we draw attention to three broader points of contrast between Jobcentre Plus and EZ WFIs: differences in the ‘division of labour’; differences in overall WFI length and frequency; and differences in the scope and focus of WFIs. These variations, which are to some extent attributable to organisational-level factors, are important to keep in mind, as they underpin some of the observations about advisory style which follow in subsequent sections.

6.4.2 Division of labour

Perhaps the most significant organisational-level factor is that the ‘division of labour’ in providing claimants with support is different in Jobcentre Plus offices compared to EZs. The EZ office serves, to quote one EZ adviser, as a ‘one-stop

shop' [221; initial lone parent WFI]. Claimants can, amongst other things, carry out job searches online, make calls to prospective employers, get hands-on help with writing a CV, covering letter or application form, undertake various forms of training, and receive benefit-related advice. By contrast, only some of these forms of assistance are directly available in Jobcentre Plus. For example, if claimants do not have access to the internet at home, advisers in Jobcentre Plus advise them to make use of their local library; although advisers can search the web on behalf of a claimant, they cannot offer claimants free access, as EZ advisers do. Jobcentre Plus advisers also tend (at least in our recordings) to refer claimants to external providers for assistance with their CV, whereas EZ advisers provide this help themselves.

6.4.3 Length and frequency of WFIs

In our sample, Jobcentre Plus New Deal interviews tend to be less frequent, and shorter, than comparable EZ interviews (see Table 6.4). New Deal claimants typically attend Jobcentre Plus every two weeks and the EZ every week. The following table shows the comparative lengths of interviews in Jobcentre Plus and EZ for our sample. This indicates the overall tendency for EZ interviews to last significantly longer than those in Jobcentre Plus. However, it should be noted that in the initial EZ 25+ interviews, claimants spend some time completing a basic skills assessment (the 'fast track' assessment), which is not included in initial ND25+ interviews.

Table 6.4 Length of WFIs in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices

| | <30 minutes | 30-44 minutes | 45 minutes or more |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------------|
| NDLP Initial (n=12) | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| NDLP Subsequent (n=15) | 12 | 3 | 0 |
| EZ LP Initial (n=9) | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| EZ LP Subsequent (n=11) | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| ND25+ Initial (n=4) | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| ND25+ Subsequent (n=17) | 15 | 1 | 1 |
| EZ 25+ Initial (n=7) | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| EZ 25+ Subsequent (n=13) | 2* | 6 | 5 |

* Both these interviews were final interviews, one re-referral and one with a claimant who was starting work.

It should be noted that, in a focus group study, Jobcentre Plus and EZ claimants reported spending similar amounts of time with their advisers (about 15-20 minutes), but EZ claimants felt that *'the adviser had "more time for them"'* (Adams and Carter, 2008: 17). This appears to have been due to a perception that EZ advisers provided more **tailored** information and advice (*ibid.*). Although not necessarily generalisable, in our dataset, EZ advisers actually do spend more time with claimants, on average, than do advisers in Jobcentre Plus.

6.4.4 Scope and focus of WFIs

Observations about the scope and focus of WFIs come predominantly from the lone parent recordings, and centre on the uniformity of the work-related circumstances

and concerns of claimants. In all nine of the initial lone parent interviews recorded in the EZ, the claimants expressed a clear desire to work and all but one emphasised that they wanted to start as soon as possible; indeed, many were already looking on their own. By contrast, in only five of the 12 initial NDLP interviews recorded in Jobcentre Plus were the claimants at the stage of actively seeking work. Among the remainder, some had already found work and were attending WFIs in order to receive other forms of support (for example, advisers conducted Better Off Calculations (BOCS), helped with claiming Working Tax Credit, and provided financial assistance with work clothes through the Adviser Discretion Fund), while some were not ready to look for work, but wanted help with attending training. Others had requested an interview for queries that were not work-related (for example, difficulties obtaining maintenance through the Child Support Agency).

Thus, there was much more diversity in the scope and focus of the WFIs which took place in Jobcentre Plus offices, with the result that the EZ interviews as a whole gave the impression of being more narrowly and consistently 'work-focused'. In part this may reflect the finding that Jobcentre Plus advisers report some confusion over what constitutes 'participating' in NDLP (Brown and Joyce, 2007). It probably also reflects the different services on offer: Jobcentre Plus advisers are able to perform Working Tax Credit calculations and fast track applications on-line; EZ advisers cannot (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006). In addition, because the New Deal adviser will often be the same person the lone parent saw previously when attending mandatory WFIs, NDLP may feel to claimants like a continuation of previous provision; this may result in their feeling able to discuss a wider range of issues (some of which may have been discussed at previous meetings). By contrast, EZ provision is likely to feel like a new programme and will involve getting to know a new adviser.

In the following sections we focus on key differences in the interactions themselves. Our research has identified clear patterns of difference in how Jobcentre Plus and EZ advisers conduct their interviews. These differences are strikingly similar, irrespective of claimant group. They are evident in both lone parent and 25+ interviews, despite variation in structure or content, and the key distinction that the lone parent programmes are voluntary and JSA programmes mandatory. Hence, in each of the sections that follow, we have (generally) combined our observations of NDLP and ND25+ WFIs, and illustrative examples from both are shown. However, where differences between the two groups are relevant, these will be highlighted.

6.5 Advisory style: collaborative, directive, proactive, positive and challenging

The general finding of our comparison is that there are five key features of advisory style that characterise WFIs in the EZ to a markedly greater extent than we see in Jobcentre Plus. These five interactional or stylistic features are that advisers are:

- **collaborative** in their approach to the interview, treating the relationship with the claimant as a partnership;

- **directive**, guiding the interview agenda, and providing explicit instruction to claimants on a range of practical matters, such as CV construction, what to wear to an interview, how to answer interview questions, and how to find suitable childcare;
- **proactive**, pursuing employment and training opportunities there and then during the interview, and ensuring that they followed claimants up (e.g. with a phone call later in the week);
- **positive** about the claimant, for example highlighting marketable skills;
- **challenging**, requiring claimants to engage actively in job seeking, and encouraging them to think differently about their situation.

We should emphasise that our finding is not that adviser interactional styles in Jobcentre Plus are entirely different from those found in EZ offices. Most of the positive features of EZ advisory styles are also to be found among Jobcentre Plus WFIs. The difference in style is a matter of degree; a difference, we suggest, that overall, lends a greater effectiveness to EZ interviewing style. Moreover, the consistent **combination** of these five features is markedly more characteristic of EZ than Jobcentre Plus interviews. What we have observed, then, is a set of tendencies, rather than an absolute difference. In the following sections we unpack these features of advisory style, with a view to extracting some effective practice guidelines on which advisers working in either arena might draw.

The following five sections present our findings on each key feature, illustrated with extracts from the WFI recordings in both EZ and Jobcentre Plus offices.

6.6 A collaborative approach with claimants

Key points

- EZ advisers emphasise their partnership with claimants, that they are working together collaboratively to find employment.
- Although this collaborative approach is not absent in the Jobcentre Plus recordings, it is both more explicit and more pervasive in the EZ.
- EZ advisers tend to talk more explicitly about **teamwork** when explaining to claimants what is expected of them, and what they can expect of the adviser.
- They also convey this sense of partnership implicitly through the regular use of 'we'.
- This is not just a way of talking; EZ advisers actively conduct a range of tasks in a collaborative fashion (for example they include claimants in inputting information on the computer).

'Teamwork' is a cornerstone of the EZ approach, laid out explicitly in the Members' Charter, which was often discussed with claimants attending the EZ offices in our

sample for the first time. The Charter informs claimants what they can expect from advisers and, in turn, what will be expected of them. EZ advisers often explain these expectations to claimants as a **fifty-fifty** split:

We're here to **buddy up** with you. [200; initial LP, EZ]

What we do here is that **we'll pair up** on a one-on-one basis. And how I look at it is it's more of like, of **two friends working together** to achieve a goal. I'm not here to tell you what to do, I'm not your parent, I'm not a babysitter, you're an adult, you know what you want and just I have the resources to kind of help you a bit easier. [236; initial LP, EZ]

If **we're** gonna develop this **fifty-fifty relationship**, **this partnership**, in trying to find you work, obviously **we're** gonna be doing a lot of work for you as well, but if you've got, **we've** got your buy-in and if you're committed to finding work as well, obviously that you're gonna enjoy, then that helps us a great deal. [237; initial 25+, EZ]

They also convey this sense of collaborative effort implicitly, through the regular use of **we**:

So look at all that **we've** got... . that's some really really good skills and some erm experience that **we've** got to take forward. [227; subsequent 25+, EZ]

Erm: (.) so if **we're** not progressing in terms of getting those interviews following a CV re-vamp and your new er spec letters et cetera et cetera... And **we're** still not getting anywhere: (0.5) then (.) something needs to be done... Rather than **us** keep banging **our** heads against the brick wall: (0.4) which I don't want to do 'cos I wanna see you progressing to work (0.4) .hh and not stagnate. [224; subsequent 25+, EZ]

And note how the claimant may also buy into this collaborative way of talking:

Extract 6.1 [210] Subsequent LP EZ (March 08)

PA: yeah s
 Cla: I'll try this one I think (0.7)
 PA: That one (.) yeah
 Cla: But that's only temporary work so I don't know (3.1)
 PA: You see **we're** looking- **we're** wanting some[thing that's
 Cla: [permanent work yeah
 PA: Yeah: rather than permanent shall **we** do a (.) s- search see if
we can [find anything **together** yeah
 Cla: [yeah see if **we** can find 'owt else yeah

The care EZ advisers take to use the inclusive **we** is illustrated in this example, in which the adviser begins referring to **you**, but cuts that off and changes to **we**.

.tch I don't know whether that's gonna happen though I mean if you've not actually tried to re-enter th- the: the service then you don't really know do you what's gonna happen (3.8) .h I think **what you doin'** ((name of claimant)) is you j- **what we're** doing is **we're** very very narrow vision on payroll [224; subsequent 25+, EZ]

PAs in the Jobcentre also use the inclusive we – and the following example illustrates a similar switch from the personal I to the idea of a collaborative effort.

I could .hhh start an:d (.) help yourself or a joint effort for you to get back into work as quickly as possible [170; subsequent NDLP, JCP]

However, not only is an explicit reference to teamwork much less common in the Jobcentre Plus dataset, but active attempts to make the interview a **joint effort** are more characteristic of the EZ interviews. This is particularly evident in the tendency for EZ advisers more actively to include claimants when inputting information onto the computer,³⁶ either in the gathering/updating of personal details or in the completion of an 'action plan'. For example, compare the following two excerpts. In the first, taken from an EZ interview, the adviser asks the claimant to confirm information that she's entering into the record; she checks almost every sentence with the claimant – sometimes by explicitly asking is that right? – as she types in the information. The adviser is not gathering new information by means of these questions. Rather, they are jointly constructing an action plan based on what has already been discussed during the interview. Note how the adviser assigns tasks to herself and the claimant individually, and tasks that will be done together at the next interview.

Extract 6.2 [200] Initial LP EZ (March 08)

1 PA: So you'd like to start work?
 2 Cla: As soon as possible, yeah.
 3 PA: Immediately. Would like a position in what areas?
 4 Cla: In (..) admin.
 5 PA: Yeah.
 6 Cla: Claimant services.
 7 PA: Yeah.
 8 Cla: And possibly waitressing again.
 9 PA: Yeah.
 10 Cla: Um.
 11 PA: (..) Shall we start there?
 12 Cla: Yeah.
 13 PA: OK. Um (..) has a CV, right?
 14 Cla: Yeah.
 15 PA: Um would like updating, and that's not updating what you
 16 have in there, just updating the marketing of it, right?
 17 Cla: I do need to change the fact that it does say currently on
 18 me((company name)) I need to change it to Feb.
 ((lines omitted during which the PA checks if the
 claimant has a computer at home))
 19 PA: OK. (..) Good job with ((place name)) need to see if hours

³⁶ The kind of commentary that advisers give as they enter information into the system is similar to 'on-line commentary', which has been shown in research on doctor-patient interaction to be a technique used during physical examination. On-line commentary can win over a patient to a doctor's assessment of the (lack of) seriousness of a condition – to get the patient 'on board' (see Mangione-Smith *et al.*, 2003).

20 can be altered, right?
 21 Cla: Mm hmm.
 22 PA: Yeah, er bring CV to ((company name))?
 23 Cla: Yeah.
 24 PA: Is that right?
 25 Cla: Yeah.
 26 PA: Apply for waitress position, OK (..) employment review, um
 27 updated CV?
 28 Cla: Yeah.
 29 PA: Yeah, that's when we're gonna do like that home
 30 improvement thing where you're going to be like I like
 31 that one, don't like that one, like that one.
 32 Cla: Yeah.
 33 PA: Yeah, OK. So next appointment will review and update CV
 34 (..) and start job searching.
 35 Cla: Mm hmm.
 36 PA: (..) Need to contact ((person name)) for current
 37 positions. I'm going to, what we have is what's called a
 38 recruitment manager.
 39 Cla: OK.
 40 PA: So she calls employers, finds out what positions are
 41 available and then um will submit your CV or whatever, so
 42 I'm going to have a chat and see what she has available
 43 right now for yourself.
 44 Cla: OK, that's good.
 45 PA: OK?
 46 Cla: Yeah.

By contrast, in the following example from a Jobcentre Plus interview, the adviser simply announces what she will put on the action plan, and then updates the records in silence (note the long pauses at lines 6, 8 and 10). When she does check whether the claimant is satisfied with the updated plan, she has already printed it off, making it much harder for the claimant to suggest changes (note the difference between this and the opportunity the claimant takes, in the EZ interview above, to suggest a change in lines 17-18).

Extract 6.3 [170] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 PA: Okay .hh I'm just gonna put on uh your action plan
 2 th[en uh ((claimant name)) that you'll aff- attend a
 3 Cla: [Uhuh
 4 PA: further appointment so that we can give you further help
 5 and suppo::rt .hhh
 6 (18.8) ((keyboard sounds))
 7 PA: () ((speaking to self)) oops ha ha
 8 (10.8) ((keyboard sounds))
 9 PA: .tch Okay
 10 (10.8)
 11 PA: Just get that off the printer for you
 12 (23.0)
 13 PA: (Here again) this is just your updated action plan
 14 ((claimant name))
 15 (1.8)
 16 PA: And your updated action point is obviously you've agreed
 17 to attend a furthe:r (0.4) appointment with myself oka[y?

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 18 Cla: | [Mhm |
| 19 (0.2) | |
| 20 PA: So you just sign (it) | |

A collaborative approach is certainly not absent in Jobcentre Plus interviews. However, as will be evident in further examples throughout this chapter, collaboration is a hallmark of how advisers approach a wide range of tasks in EZ interviews, including putting together a claimant's CV, considering and formulating job goals and applying for jobs.

It is worth noting that an alternative strategy for 'collaborating' with claimants was evident among some advisers (in both Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices). Whilst in EZ interviews advisers generally shared tasks with claimants in ways illustrated previously, some advisers 'shared the experience' with claimants literally, by referring to their own shortcomings (for example how inept they are with computers) and experiences (for example having been unemployed, having signed on and so forth). Advisers evidently did so as a means to show their sympathetic appreciation of the claimant's circumstances. But the effect was sometimes to divert the talk away from focusing on the claimant.

6.7 A directive approach

Key points

- EZ advisers tend to be more directive in their approach to claimants.
- They typically set a clear agenda for subsequent interviews during the initial WFI, and are less likely to be diverted from the work-focused agenda.
- EZ advisers tend to instruct claimants explicitly in 'what to do'.
- One very practical form of instruction is the development of CVs, which EZ advisers do there and then with claimants.
- Jobcentre Plus advisers, by contrast, typically refer claimants to external providers for CV development. This is clearly an organisational difference, but can be detrimental to the claimant's job applications (for example when delays result in missed deadlines).
- EZ advisers were also most explicit and directive in their approach to constructing an action plan, and in enquiring about whether a claimant had followed up previously agreed action points.

6.7.1 Introduction

Despite the more collaborative approach found in EZ interviews, and the emphasis that EZ advisers give to working in partnership with claimants, they manage at the same time to be relatively directive. They do not expect the claimant and adviser to contribute to the partnership in the same way: the claimant is treated as requiring

guidance and instruction, which the adviser has special expertise to provide. Ways in which such adviser directivity was observable during WFIs included: setting and keeping to an agenda; giving practical advice and instructions; and allocating and reviewing action points.

6.7.2 Setting an agenda

At initial interviews, EZ advisers tend to take the lead in setting a clear agenda for the claimant's involvement in the programme. Thus, while the discussion is usually closely tailored to the claimant's individual needs (with time devoted to talking about the claimant's plans, goals and previous experience), there is a clear structure to initial EZ interviews that is largely absent in comparable Jobcentre Plus interviews. This agenda-setting is partly achieved by working through a list of possible services available to claimants as a basis for determining what help should be provided in subsequent interviews. So, for example, Extract 6.4, the adviser summarises their discussion, providing a 'map' of how she intends to help the claimant move towards work.

Extract 6.4 [236] Initial LP EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: So basically, in my mind what I think would be a good
 2 route for you is um (..) is to do up the CV first to work
 3 on your confidence I think.
 4 Cla: Okay.
 5 PA: Not that you don't have any confidence, I think when it
 6 comes to job searching you're lacking in confidence. I
 7 think I need to do up a CV to show what you have
 8 accomplished so that you can feel better about yourself.
 9 Cla: Okay.
 10 PA: Um maybe go a bit further into discussion of some of the
 11 routeways we have, maybe doing um, I can show them all to
 12 you, like we've got the local call centre, you've got the
 13 retail, you don't need the food and catering 'cos you've
 14 already done that.
 15 Cla: Yeah.
 16 PA: Um are you wanting to start work like now or you wanna,
 17 are you like I'd like to take two or three weeks, get
 18 myself ready and?
 19 Cla: Er as soon as possible really.
 20 PA: Okay soon as possible, yeah.
 21 Cla: Yeah.
 22 PA: Um (..) and then um (..) get a CV done, once we've done a
 23 CV we can start job searching, go through some training
 24 options that you
 25 Cla: Yeah.
 26 PA: You know, it's just more of just, so you know that
 27 they're there and you can decide whether you wanna do
 28 them or not.
 29 Cla: Right.

There was no comparable, uniform structure to the initial NDLP interviews in Jobcentre Plus.³⁷ Whilst some are similarly focused on introducing the claimant to the NDLP programme, others bear little relation to NDLP, and the agenda is regularly set by whatever query the claimant comes in with. In part this reflects the diversity of these interviews (discussed in Section 6.4.4), which sometimes become focused on concerns not directly relating to the claimant's movement into work. Again, we should stress that this may well be an **organisational** difference between Jobcentre Plus and EZ. However, one consequence is that only four of our 12 initial NDLP interviews were structured around developing an ongoing programme of support for active job seeking – compared with all nine of those initial lone parent interviews recorded in the EZ.

In short, agenda-setting in EZ interviews seems very much adviser-led, whilst Jobcentre Plus interviews are more frequently subject to being 'diverted' by claimants. Where a claimant's pressing concern is announced at the very outset of the interview, it can become difficult for the adviser to get the interview back on track. As such, Jobcentre Plus interviews can frequently seem to be claimant-led, which in some circumstances might be regarded as appropriate; in these WFI, however, claimants' 'diversions' often detracted from a focus on work, and could result in the adviser's agenda being abandoned.

6.7.3 Giving practical advice and instructions

In EZ WFIs, we find a pattern of advisers explicitly 'instructing' claimants in 'what to do' – what to do in making a job application, how to follow up applications, how to highlight skills to a potential employer, how to dress and conduct oneself in an interview, how to answer interview questions, how to find suitable childcare, and so forth. For example, in the following excerpt, the adviser provides practical advice on how to word a covering letter.

And when you're writing that letter to them, make sure that when you're wording it ... it's "due to the hours of my childcare provider... This is what I can work", so you're not taking the, it's not like oh no I only choose to work these hours, you're actually flipping it, saying, "I can only work this because...". [200; initial LP, EZ]

There are some examples in our dataset of Jobcentre Plus advisers instructing claimants in a similarly explicit fashion. For instance, in the following extract, the adviser responds to a claimant's joke – that the adviser might bribe a company to give her a job – by providing guidance on how to make use of work trials, including what to say to the employer.

³⁷ We recorded a sample of only four initial ND25+ interviews in Jobcentre Plus, too few to make any worthwhile comparisons of the kind reported for initial NDLP interviews. These four interviews were conducted by two advisers, in offices in different parts of the country. Although each seemed to work to an agenda, their agendas were quite different; one adviser treated the entire interview as largely information-giving and explanatory, whilst the other quickly focused on steps towards work.

Extract 6.5 [178] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 PA: So yeah (.) is there anything else then today o::r are you
2 happy, (.) to go and see ((company name)) (.) and ()
3 then go to your ((private provider))
4 Cla: ((sniffs) you could always bribe 'em tell 'em to give me a
5 jo[:b
6 PA: [Uhah
7 Cla: Ha ha
8 PA: Well what about work tri::als
9 (0.4)
10 PA: You know go over and se- (.) sell the work trial to 'em
11 say to 'em (0.2) u::m (0.4) (I'll) give you t' leaflet
12 (7.0)
13 PA: It would help if I've got (more than one wouldn't it)
14 (4.0)
15 Cla: [(So-)
16 PA: [What they do on a work trial you can go:: and say to 'em
17 "Ri::ght" .hhhh (0.2) "I'm quite happy to come and work
18 for you for a week or two wee:ks:" hm- you don't get paid
19 or anything like that and you'll stay on your benefits it
20 won't affect your benefit (so) .hh as long as it comes
21 through me and we know about it that's fine .hh but you
22 can go and wo:rk the:re (0.4) even if it's just for a
23 wee:k
((Lines omitted during which PA explains that the claimant
would be reimbursed for travel costs, given lunch money, and could do
the work trial for up to six weeks, although this probably wouldn't
be necessary))
24 PA: But you're cheeky enough go an- (0.6)
25 Cla: Huh huh [ha ha
26 PA: [ask for Personnel Woman and say to her "look"
27 (0.6) "I'll come and work for you for a week"
28 Cla: Excuse me ha ha ha
29 PA: Free of cha::[rge
30 Cla: [Ha Yea(h) (h) (h)h .hh
31 PA: And sell yourself that way but you'd be surprised how many
32 are taking up now because it's very hard for them to gauge
33 whether you'll be any good at job just from (.) meeting
34 you for half [an hour .hhh And quite a lot of employers
35 Cla: [Yea:h
36 PA: now are quite happy to do work tri:als

This kind of detailed, explicit instruction is less common, generally, in the Jobcentre Plus recordings. More specifically, there is one very practical difference between the EZ and Jobcentre Plus interviews in our dataset: EZ advisers routinely provide 'hands on' assistance with constructing a CV, whereas Jobcentre Plus advisers almost never do.

In our EZ recordings, the advisers spend a considerable proportion of the WFI working through the claimant's work record and constructing the CV with them – advising the claimant about such concrete matters as what should be included, how much to write about certain topics, and so on. Here, for instance, the adviser instructs the claimant about how many lines to write for her personal profile, then

moves to explain how the personal qualities and skills a claimant includes in her CV can be 'proved' through highlighting aspects of her work experience.

Extract 6.6 [227] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: Right so we're gonna expand on that sli:ghtly (.) and put
2 a little bit of your experience [in there as well later on
3 Cla: [right ah
4 PA: Okay [.hhh
5 Cla: [right
6 PA: So what I've done there is all I've done is taken those
7 (0.6) put them into sentences really (0.5) tch but I think
8 I'd like to expand it a little bit more .hh I mean
9 personal profile don't need to be any longer than probably
10 about five lines really cos they don't want to be like
11 reading a full page and stuff .hh cos what we're gonna do
12 is we're gonna put a skills and abilities in the:re (.) as
13 well as work experience
14 Cla: (°Mm hm [right°)
15 PA: [okay
16 (2.6)
17 PA: .hhh so hhh. work experience you:r last job was March oh
18 seven to March oh-eight is that correct
19 (1.0) ((non-verbal confirmation?))
20 PA: This is the voluntary one that you did in't it .hh well
21 that's gonna look really good on your CV (0.6) .hh erm
22 because even if you're not in paid work if you're willing
23 to do l- voluntary work it just shows that you're
24 motivated so actually you've c- automatically pro:ved the
25 fact that you've put self-motivated there .hhh cos what we
26 need to do in our CVs is .hh (0.2) whatever you put on the
27 CV we need to be able to prove that we've got it or we've
28 done it
29 (0.4)
30 PA: otherwise there's no point putting it down

By contrast, Jobcentre Plus advisers seldom provide hands-on assistance with CV development. Instead, they tend to ask claimants whether they have a CV, and if the claimant is in any doubt about their CV or does not have one, advisers typically provide information about the 'help and support' available – to be obtained either at some future interview or, commonly, through a referral to a back-to-work programme.

As already noted, it is presumably the different organisational 'division of labour' that means Jobcentre Plus advisers do not get involved in assisting claimants with CV development. However, one effect of this division of labour is that it potentially delays the development of the CV, sometimes to the detriment of making a job application. For example, in the following extract, the claimant has seen some vacancies for which she might apply, but does not yet have a CV – despite having been on Jobcentre Plus's NDLP programme for three months and having been referred to another back-to-work provider.

Extract 6.7 [159] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 PA: Yeah, everything going all right?
 2 Cla: Yeah, yeah, it is, yeah. There's some jobs actually,
 3 there's er (...) I need a CV for that one.
 4 PA: Right, and, and, and are they helping you?
 5 Cla: Yeah, they, yeah.
 6 PA: Have, have they helped you with that?
 7 Cla: Yeah, well I've handed it in what I've written down, er
 8 they're going to print it out for me for next week, so I
 9 don't know whether that'll be too late to apply for that
 10 or not.
 11 ((9 seconds))
 12 PA: That's good, that's good, that's good.
 ((and then later in the interview...))
 13 PA: Pity about, it's a pity about the grocery shop but never
 14 mind.
 15 Cla: Yeah, keep, yeah.
 16 PA: Try, well you must try and get them to finish off your CV
 17 for you next time you're down there.
 18 Cla: Yeah, yeah.

In contrast, an advantage of the 'one-stop shop' approach of the EZ is that advisers retain greater control over the claimant's holistic package of support, and are better able to coordinate, direct and expedite various elements of this support as necessary.

6.7.4 Allocating and reviewing action points

EZ advisers typically identify clear tasks for the claimant to carry out before the next meeting (for example, complete a CV template; obtain information about childcare; apply for a certain number of jobs; submit a CV, speculatively, to a certain number of employers). These tasks are entered into an action plan, and are usually checked at the next interview to ensure they have been accomplished.

There is a tendency for Jobcentre Plus advisers – especially, but not exclusively, in interviews with ND25+ claimants – to ask less specific questions about what has been done since the last meeting. Frequently in Jobcentre Plus interviews, when claimants report that since their last meeting they have applied for 'some jobs', or 'two jobs', the adviser does not enquire about specifically which and how many jobs, whether the claimant has received any response, or whether (if they've heard nothing) the claimant has followed up the progress of their application – questions that EZ advisers generally ask rigorously. Some Jobcentre Plus subsequent interviews begin without any reference to the action plan agreed at the previous meeting. A case is shown in the following extract, in which the action plan is only discussed towards the end of the interview (notice that the adviser is bringing things to a close by fixing the next appointment, line 29). Moreover, it is the claimant who first mentions (implicitly) the action plan from the previous meeting – when he refers to having sent off his CV for a position (lines 4-5) which evidently the adviser had brought to the claimant's attention at their last meeting, but has forgotten (lines 20-26).

Extract 6.8 [142] Subsequent ND25+ JCP

1 PA: So I'll record that on here. OK. ((15 seconds))
 2 Cla: I've just got to go back down the Council now. ((laughs))
 3 PA: Yeah, OK.
 4 Cla: (...) So there's been a bit of a spin (a'the moment) but
 5 I've sent off my CV to (names company).
 6 PA: Oh good, yeah.
 7 Cla: And my brother's picking me up an application form for
 8 the ((name of pub?)).
 9 PA: Yeah. Oh good, yeah. You couldn't go in.
 10 Cla: He's in there tonight, he's in there tonight.
 11 PA: You couldn't go in with your brother then at all, it's
 12 not convenient?
 13 Cla: No, no he's got two, two big dogs.
 14 PA: Has he?
 15 Cla: Yeah.
 16 PA: Thank you, yeah.
 17 Cla: (Only has) to be in a room, you know, the dogs don't
 18 smell or anything, but they just, the fur and (...) it's
 19 just not convenient.
 20 PA: Yeah, OK, well that's good. Then, so, funnily enough I
 21 was going to tell you about the job at the ((name of
 22 pub)) so your brother's put you onto that, yeah.
 23 Cla: No, you did.
 24 PA: Did I put you onto that?
 25 Cla: Yeah, you did.
 26 PA: I did, I thought, yeah, it rang bells.
 27 Cla: Yeah, and he's going down there this evening with his
 28 mates, so he's picking me up an application form.
 29 PA: An application form. So I'll book you in for um, I'm not
 30 here for, yeah, I'm not here next week,

Again, we should emphasise that this difference between Jobcentre Plus and EZ interviews is a matter of degree. Jobcentre Plus advisers do, at the beginning of some subsequent interviews, follow up action plans agreed at previous meetings by asking about and checking previously agreed actions. But there is a tendency in EZ interviews for advisers to begin by more thoroughly reviewing applications and other actions since the last meeting, and to enquire more closely about progress with applications. For instance in Extract 6.9, from an EZ WFI immediately after initial greetings have been exchanged (not shown), the adviser directly and explicitly asks about progress since they last met (lines 1-2). In response, the claimant pulls from his pocket the relevant paperwork recording his job search actions (in the silence shown in line 4) and hands it to the adviser, who then refers to a company named in their previous action plan (lines 5 and 7-8), and asks about progress with the claimant's enquiry about a position with the company named. After which the adviser continues scrutinising progress with other job possibilities.

Extract 6.9 [229] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: So how have you been getting on then since your last
 2 appointment?
 3 Cla: (Here) / (Ok.)

4 ((20 secs.)) (claimant takes papers from pocket
 5 PA: ((Company name)).
 6 Cla: Sorry?
 7 PA: ((repeats company name)) so what's happened with this
 8 one, is this one you've actually phoned up?
 9 Cla: They're just taking, taking, taking all the details, gave
 10 them all the details from, I phoned, I phoned them on, in
 11 Job Centre.
 12 PA: Mm hmm. (..) ((Company name))?
 13 Cla: Yeah, they also took my details.
 14 PA: Er ((company name)) is that the same?
 15 Cla: The same, they are ((company name)) (..) no they're
 16 different, they are different.
 17 PA: Did you leave the details with them?
 18 Cla: Yeah, because this is the (?) for (?) operative job.
 19 PA: Yeah, but it's just a case of having left your details.
 20 Cla: Yeah, yeah.
 21 PA: With them?

In the following example, the adviser asks – in the early stages of the interview – about the claimant's efforts to find work. By contrast with the adviser's rather thorough scrutiny in the previous (EZ) example, here in Extract 6.10 the adviser is much less rigorous or demanding in his questioning.

Extract 6.10 [040] Subsequent ND 25+ JCP (Aug 07)

1 PA: .hh So as far as your job search goe:s I'll put down that
 2 ehm: (0.5) .t (0.6) you've been reading the papers
 3 ((names local newspapers)) yeah,
 4 Cla: Yeah ((repeats names of locals newspapers))
 5 (0.4) ((typing))
 6 PA: Been much in them or not
 7 (1.0)
 8 Cla: Pardon
 9 (0.5)
 10 PA: Been much in them or not ((more slowly))
 11 (0.4)
 12 PA: [((clears throat))
 13 Cla: [(Well) there's been (.) a lot of jobs but (0.6) nothing
 14 for me d'you know what I mea[n ()
 15 PA: [Yeah I know what you mean i-
 16 on the face of it [a lot of vacancies but
 17 Cla: [On the f:ace of it a
 18 PA: [nothing suitable yeah:
 19 Cla: [lot of vacancies but (0.2) y:es:
 20 (4.7) ((typing))
 21 PA: ((clears throat))
 22 (0.7)
 23 PA: Okay I'll put- how often do you tend to come into the
 24 Job, Centr::e

The adviser does not, for instance, ask the claimant why the various positions advertised were unsuitable (see lines 13-19). And evidently the action plan agreed in their previous meeting was sufficiently general or 'open' for this (checking the newspapers) to count as having fulfilled that plan (see line 23). Indeed, the PA

suggests in his opening lines here that he will 'put down' that the claimant has been looking in the papers for positions; the claimant has not been asked what he has been doing, nor did he say he had been looking in the papers.

It seems that action plans are agreed explicitly by advisers and claimants in EZ interviews, that they are generally detailed, specific and may include targets for enquiring about or applying for specified positions. In Jobcentre Plus interviews, by contrast, action plans appear frequently not to have been explicitly agreed (in eight of the 17 subsequent ND25+ interviews recorded in Jobcentre Plus offices, action plans appear not to have been drawn up or are not referred to explicitly; in one of these interviews, the claimant was signing off, having obtained work; and in another the claimant was plainly too unwell to seek work). In those Jobcentre Plus WFIs in which action plans are explicitly agreed, they are often general and limited (usually repeating the target in the previous plan, to search for positions vacant by looking in the newspapers and so on), as in Extract 6.11.

Extract 6.11 [040] Subsequent ND 25+ JCP (Aug 07)

1 PA: .t .hh (And) so as far as any agreed action I('ll) just
 2 put down that you'll apply for that vacancy ((claimant
 3 name)) and er: [.hh I'll probably see you in: (1.6)
 4 Cla: [Yes
 5 PA: (right) two weeks' time (what are we at) today the: h.
 6 (0.2) ninth .h right in two weeks' time ((claimant's
 7 name)) if you can sign (0.2) the bottom end as usu[al
 8 Cla: [Yes
 9 PA: .hh I'm actually on holiday that week
 10 (0.5)
 11 PA: And then what I'll do is see you two weeks after that on
 12 the sixth of September is that okay with your good self

6.8 A proactive approach

Key points

- EZ advisers tend to take a more proactive approach to a range of tasks, encouraging claimants to take appropriate action there and then during the interview.
- In Jobcentre Plus, it was far more common for claimants to be given information about a course of action, and left to pursue it on their own.
- A proactive approach can result in immediate, measurable success: an application is made, a CV completed, or childcare arrangements are made, for example.
- Information provision alone runs the risk of advisers missing opportunities to move claimants towards work, since the necessary actions may never be taken.

Closely allied to the tendency to be directive is EZ advisers' proactive approach to the tasks involved in moving claimants towards work. This is clearly evident in

how advisers help claimants to apply for jobs, or overcome other barriers to work. Advisers typically encourage claimants to make relevant phone calls (for example, to request an application form or obtain information about childcare) there and then during EZ interviews. By contrast, in Jobcentre Plus, advisers often provide claimants with the information they need, but leave it up to the claimant to act on that information, as in the following example.

Extract 6.12 [170] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 Cla: Because then I've got to (or) obviously think about the
 2 school holidays as well you see=
 3 PA: =Yea[h
 4 Cla: [of: getting childcare for that
 5 PA: Yeah .hhh you are aware tha::t when you claim working tax
 6 credit as long as it's registered childcare Inland
 7 Reven[ue will pay eighty per ce[nt
 8 Cla: [Mm: [.hhh Yeah
 9 [I know but it's- it's
 10 PA: [of your weekly childcare [costs
 11 Cla: [finding-
 12 PA: It's fin[ding (.) the childcare
 13 Cla: [I mean I-
 14 Childcare in our area I mean is- is so rife there's that
 15 many of them but (0.2) they're a::ll (0.6) crammed (.)
 16 full
 17 PA: Yes: [yeah
 18 Cla: [You know I mean it's- it's [quite a-
 19 PA: [Have you: have you
 20 already been in contact with the learning information
 21 service ((claimant name)) to get a list of all the
 22 registered [childcare provision there is
 23 Cla: [No
 24 PA: .hh If I can just give you a card on that (then)
 25 (2.8)
 26 PA: This card that I've here ((claimant's name)) on the
 27 childcare option side at the bottom you've got a telephone
 28 numbe[r if you ring that number it puts you through to
 29 Cla: [Mm hm
 30 PA: the er- early learning information service and what they
 31 will do is if you just explain to them that you're
 32 interested in finding out .hhh what childcare provision
 33 there is in around the are[a where you live
 34 Cla: [Mm
 35 PA: .hh what they will do from their database they'll print
 36 off registered childcare provision and post it out to
 37 [yuh
 38 Cla: [Yeah
 39 PA: .hhh But then it is down to you as a parent to ring
 40 [round and find out what the availabilities are .hhhh
 41 Cla: [to ring round and find them
 42 PA: but you may find that when they send you out the list
 43 there's a few more than what you maybe thou[ght
 44 Cla: [Yeah

The way in which the adviser may leave matters up to the claimant is especially clear in line 28, above (where the adviser gives the information in a conditional form, *if you ring ...*), following that with *it's down to you*. This is a relatively passive

approach towards expectations concerning claimants' actions – as is the approach taken by the adviser in Extract 6.13. The adviser is reading information about job vacancies off the screen (*it says here*, line 1) and has noticed a limited contract position in the claimant's preferred type of work. The adviser's stance towards the possibility of the claimant applying for this job is more passive than proactive (see line 4, *it's one of those judgement calls*; and lines 7-8 and 12, *it's up to you...*).

Extract 6.13 [041] Subsequent ND 25+ JCP (Aug 07)

1 PA: ...yeah: it- it- it says he:re cos er according to this
 2 it's it's up until:: (0.2) December .h[h so yea:h: but
 3 Cla: [Yeah
 4 PA: th- but it's- it's one of those judgment calls cos you
 5 could find that- (0.4) during that twelve weeks you get
 6 something el:se or you may find that it ends (out or
 7 it's) there again you could find that it's extended it's
 8 really up [to you
 9 Cla: [Mhm .hhh [yeah I'll
 10 PA: [Do you wanna (lea:)
 11 (0.8)
 12 PA: It's up to you
 13 (0.6)
 14 PA: Even if you give him a ring I suppo[se and let
 15 Cla: [Yeah
 16 PA: us know how you get on

In the following interview from an EZ, by contrast, the adviser is more proactive; she not only conducts a search for childcare providers during the interview, but encourages the claimant to make a call for further information there and then. Note how the adviser pursues the matter of making the call in two ways: First, the claimant initially resists making the call because she has already made contact with a childminder who has promised to call her back. In response to this, the adviser gets the claimant to commit to calling the adviser back later to let her know the outcome of this call (lines 28-31); and second, having found that the claimant has used a childminder in the past, the adviser successfully encourages her to ring this childminder straight away (lines 32-37).

Extract 6.14 [194] Subsequent LP EZ (Feb 08)

1 PA: Let's have a little look at child care then cos I'm
 2 just wanna (0.2) ge:t something in your [head
 3 Cla: [yea::h
 4 PA: n-now y:ou're going to see: people ()
 5 (4.8)
 6 PA: So do you want to look at nu:rseries again or child
 7 minders or bo:th ((claimant name))
 8 (0.2)
 9 Cla: tch °I'll look at° bo::th
 10 (1.1)
 11 PA: Ri::ght let me just get into my: u:::m (0.6)
 12 ((coughs)) chi:ld care link
 ((lines omitted during which PA searches for childminders and nurseries in an online database))

13 PA: D'you want to give them a ca:ll while you're he:re
 14 just to find out whether they can ta:ke hi[:m
 15 Cla: [I've bee:n
 16 to see them this morning they're gonna ring me::
 17 (0.1)
 18 PA: Oh are [the:y
 19 Cla: [yea:h (0.1) later on toda::y
 20 (0.2)
 21 PA: j- n- so: that [you'll def°°initely°°
 22 Cla: [called to see 'em cos >it's just< I
 23 got ((child's na::me)) from schoo:l (0.2) so I went
 24 to school and then went [to see 'em
 25 PA: [so they'll definitely let
 26 you know [toda::y
 27 Cla: [ye:s she will °she said yea::h°
 28 PA: So could you call me and let me know [as soon
 29 Cla: [ye:s
 30 PA: [as what they sa::y yea::h?
 31 Cla: [°okay°
 ((lines omitted during which they discuss the previous childminder
 the claimant had, who was very good but would not work weekends))
 32 PA: So d'you think it might be worth giving ((name)) a
 33 call just to see if what vacant she's got at the
 34 mo:ment [then (0.2) and [see if she would: be
 35 Cla: [mm mm [oka:y
 36 PA: flexible around doing any weekends at all she mi:ght
 37 do 'em I don't kno::w so you can only ask ca:n't you
 38 (0.2)
 39 Cla: Ri::ght
 40 (1.0)
 41 Cla: °oka:y°
 ((After some further discussion claimant makes the call and arranges a
 childcare session))

This distinction between information provision alone, and information provision plus proactive efforts to help the claimant take a next step, has important implications for the likely outcome.³⁸ This is illustrated in Extract 6.15, a Jobcentre Plus interview in which the claimant acknowledges having received information about a back-to-work programme, but had not acted independently between WFIs – but then enrolls when the adviser directly offers to book her an induction interview.

Extract 6.15 [158] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 PA: I tell you what we have got ((claimant's name)). (..) I
 2 don't know if I discussed this with you last time, and
 3 that's.
 4 Cla: That's (?).
 5 PA: Um they've just brought, they've just brought out a new
 6 programme called, from the ((centre name)) do you?

³⁸ For a more extended discussion of the 'information only' strategy, see Section 5.6.3.

7 Cla: Yeah.
 8 PA: Have you heard of the ((centre name)) before, down near
 9 the ((landmark))?
 10 Cla: You give me the leaflet didn't you?
 11 PA: Yeah.
 12 Cla: About it, yeah.

 13 PA: And they will give you, they will give you help to, with
 14 job vacancies. They'll also give you a hand with preparing
 15 your CV and er application forms. Um (..) there's a lot of
 16 jobs now on the Internet which aren't available anywhere
 17 else, so they've got Internet access for you. Got (..)
 18 free postage, stationery, and they'll also give you new,
 19 maybe new job ideas and maybe do like confidence building.
 20 Cla: Yeah.
 21 PA: Things, interview techniques.
 22 Cla: Right.
 23 PA: Would you be interested in doing them?
 24 Cla: Yeah, yeah, that's fine.

 25 PA: Do you want me to book you an induction interview?
 26 Cla: Yeah.
 ((PA books the induction during this WFI))

Similarly, in the following Jobcentre Plus ND25+ interview, the adviser actively books the claimant onto a back-to-work programme. Notice particularly the shift from formulating this action as something the adviser *can* do (line 1) to something he is *gonna* do (line 12). In other words, it is not left up to the claimant either to book himself onto the course or to ask the adviser to do so on his behalf – the adviser is going to go ahead and make the booking.

Extract 6.16 [137] Initial NDLP JCP (Nov 07)

1 PA: I can book you onto a course called The Gateway to Work
 2 course. which is a two: week course event .HHH run by:: a
 3 >company< called ((company name)) who ran ran the ((local
 4 centre name)) as well I think you went to see them once
 5 bef[ore. .hh in that]
 6 Cla: [that's right but I didn't have] the add[ress]
 7 PA: [no.]
 8 Cla: [
 9 PA: [in that] location .hh=
 10 Cla: =down at the bottom of [the (.)] ((name)) Street [yeah]
 11 PA: [yeah] [Now]
 12 I'm gonna book you o:n to that the fir[st] course
 13 Cla: [yeah]
 14 PA: [they've [got the two week] course is going to be on .hhHH
 15 Cla: [Now [I've got an address]
 16 PA: Monday the ((date)) .hh on this two week course you'll be
 17 wi::th (0.4) ten to fifteen other people of similar length
 18 unemplo:yment (0.2) .hhh a:nd you'll be >getting' a< group

```

19      setting talking about your joint expe:riences about
20      unemployment .hh what kind of work you want to do::
21      [do mock interview::ws      ]
22 Cla:  [what kind of work of work] you've done before
23 PA:   done before
24 Cla:  Yeah
25 PA:   .hhh u:m job application forms group discussions all
26      [trying] the kind of things to try and help you focus
27 Cla:  [aha      ]
28 PA:   on getting into work

```

Extracts 6.15 and 6.16, provide clear illustrations of how the differences between Jobcentre Plus and EZ are a matter of degree. It is not that Jobcentre Plus advisers are always passive, while EZ advisers are always proactive. The strategies we have identified as typical of the EZ advisory style are also to be found in Jobcentre Plus interviews; they are just less prominent and less pervasive.

6.9 A **positive** approach towards claimants, highlighting their skills and achievements

Key points

- Advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices are positive towards claimants, and encouraging about their prospects for work.
- EZ advisers are particularly skilled at highlighting claimants' aptitudes and capabilities, discussing, more thoroughly, their work experience in order to spotlight their 'marketable' skills.
- As EZ advisers discuss a claimants' work experience and skills, these are incorporated into the claimant's CV, giving the claimant a more direct appreciation of the connections between the CV and what they might say about themselves in interviews.
- EZ advisers are particularly complimentary about claimants' achievements, and encourage claimants to broaden their job goals but at the same time to be more aspirational.

Advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices are positive towards claimants, and encouraging about their prospects for work. For example, they might compliment claimants on their decision to pursue training opportunities (*I think it's good that you're doing this... very good* [184, initial NDLP, Jobcentre Plus]) or highlight unexpected ways in which they might be appealing to an employer:

Extract 6.17 [158] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 Cla: See I'm hoping, it's just obviously I'm not qualified for
 2 a lot of things am I? So I mean I knew they'd just done.
 3 PA: Well you have got qualifications though, I mean this,
 4 this.
 5 Cla: I've only done cleaning in like ((supermarket name)) so
 6 that's the problem.
 7 PA: Yeah, but what you've got to remember, what you've got to
 8 remember ((claimant's name)) is that you've got a lot to
 9 offer an employer, an employer. Employers aren't
 10 necessarily after huge amounts of qualifications.
 11 Cla: Right.
 12 PA: They want people who are honest, people who are reliable,
 13 and you've got those qualifications.
 14 Cla: Yeah.

This ability to translate the claimant's abilities or past experiences into marketable skills was particularly well demonstrated by EZ advisers when assisting claimants with CV development. They showed a particular aptitude for placing the 'best light' on experiences that the claimant may not have thought relevant or at all impressive. A clear example is the extensive encouragement that the adviser offers in the following excerpt. This 25+ claimant has served a jail sentence, as a consequence of which (at least in part) she has a limited employment record. However, she has been doing some voluntary work; though this is only for two hours a week, the adviser is able, on the basis of this and an event the claimant was required to organise, to identify a range of practical work-related skills, including handling payroll, leadership and management skills.

Extract 6.18 [227] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: so (.) you know (0.2) there you go (.) you've proved your
 2 self-motivation again
 3 (0.4)
 4 PA: just by doing that (.) okay .hh so we'll put that down as
 5 well so that's May oh-six (0.2) to Jan:uary oh-seven
 ((then a little later...))
 6 PA: okay so this is [your organisational skills
 7 Cla: [mm
 8 PA: that we're showing now (.) as well
 9 1.8)
 10 PA: so there's a:ll those things that you did just as (a) bar
 11 staff
 12 (1.0)
 13 PA: tch oh I've- I've thought of it (0.4) relief management
 14 (1.4)
 15 Cla: [huh huh
 16 PA: [yeah
 17 (1.2)
 18 PA: a relief when he comes back you don't have to do it any
 19 more hh.
 20 Cla: yeah [ppfhhhh
 21 PA: [huh huh huh huh huh

22 Cla: [I was
 23 PA: [huh
 24 Cla: I had to sleep there as well it were like och:: .hhhhh I
 25 had to live there while he he went aw[ay
 26 PA: [Well the best thing
 27 about that is you're not got far to go to work
 28 have [you really
 29 Cla: [no
 30 PA: just down t' stairs
 31 (1.0)
 32 PA: okay? .h and the:n we did similar things at ((name of
 33 employer)) yeah
 34 Cla: yeah but there were n- (1.0) it were just me that were there
 35 (0.8)
 36 Cla: the owner (0.4) had moved out (0.4) and just left me in
 37 charge tot[ally
 38 PA: [so you were totally responsible
 39 Cla: [ahh
 40 PA: [for everything
 .
 ((12 lines omitted))
 .
 53 PA: .hh what you >don't wanna do< is sell yourself sho:rt y-
 54 because these (.) leadership skills and these management s-
 55 ship skills (0.2) and all this is really really gonna be
 56 important to the next employer

EZ advisers also work hard to counter claimants' negative statements about themselves, providing evidence of the claimant's positive attributes from their own experience of the claimant, offering compliments, and giving claimants the words needed to sell themselves to employers. For example, in response to a lone parent's concern that she sounds 'common' in interviews, the adviser told her: *but you don't come across like tha:t* [221; initial LP, EZ]; and a little later in the same interview, we see the adviser providing more extensive affirmation of the claimant.

Extract 6.19 [221] Initial LP EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: .h What do you think you're good at
 2 (0.3) ((child shouts))
 3 PA: What are your best skills
 4 (0.3)
 5 PA: Do you think
 6 (2.2)
 7 Cla: I don't know
 8 (1.1)
 9 PA: .h I mean this is the first time I:'ve met you: and I
 10 don't think you've got any communication problems I think
 11 you come across rea:lly nicely you're really pleasant
 12 (0.5)
 13 PA: And I th- I [don't think you're lacking in
 14 Cla: [((chuckles))
 15 PA: confidence you don't .h you know some people you get the
 16 impression they're kind of- .h (they) don't really say

17 much 'cos they're quite and stuff I think you've got a
 18 lovely outgoing personality and I think for reception .h
 19 claimant service or retail (.) waitressing anything
 20 that's front facing I think you're perfect
 21 (0.3)
 22 PA: [I think you're rea:lly- I do: I do I think
 23 Cla: [Oh that's lovely thank you ((chuckles))
 24 PA: You'd be really goo:d in: (0.2) you know: in any of those
 25 roles
 26 (0.2)
 27 PA: 'Cos I think you've got that (0.4) friendly approachable
 28 (0.3) nature
 29 (0.4)
 30 PA: I don't think you know if you were working in a shop or
 31 something .h (0.2) I wouldn't be worried about:
 32 (.) coming up to you and saying excuse me but have
 33 you got [you know
 34 Cla: [((chuckles))
 35 PA: 'Cos some people have that (0.4) sort of hard edge
 36 [don't they but I think you'd be lovely in any of those
 37 Cla: [Y(hh)ea(hh)
 38 PA: roles so I'm gonna put .hh communication there
 39 (2.2)
 40 PA: .t Eh::m (0.8) I'm gonna put friendly and approachable

This more positive approach can have an immediate impact on claimants, as illustrated by the following excerpt. Concerned that the claimant appears rather taken aback towards the end of her first interview, the adviser probes to see if something is wrong. On the contrary, the claimant explains that this is the first time she has been told she might aim higher in her job search.

Extract 6.20 [236] Initial LP EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: Okay, are you just, are you worried about anything, have
 2 you got something, anything on your mind or are you all
 3 right?
 4 Cla: I'm just amazed that I can actually do other things apart
 5 from bar work and cleaning, cos I, they're not like this
 6 at Jobcentre, it's just like oh well you can't do this and
 7 you can't do that, you can do this, this and this and.
 8 PA: There's lots that you can do.
 9 Cla: Yeah.
 10 PA: There's lots that you have talent for, it's just a matter
 11 of putting it on a CV, telling that to an employer. If you
 12 want to do call centre work, you know, it'll take no time
 13 to get in it.
 14 Cla: Yeah.
 15 PA: So we can do that as well, it's up to you, you can do
 16 anything you'd like to do.

There is a close association between the ways in which EZ advisers 'tutor' claimants in the skills, aptitudes, and experience that they should be highlighting to employers and the encouragement advisers offer claimants through congratulating and complimenting them on what they have achieved. As illustrated in Extract

6.19, an opportunity for such positive framing of claimants' skills and aptitudes is presented to EZ advisers in the development of a CV. This opportunity may be less available to Jobcentre Plus advisers, who do not get directly involved in this aspect of vocational support. However, we suggest that through more engaged interaction with claimants, there is greater scope for Jobcentre Plus advisers to compliment and positively encourage their clients. For example, during job searches or discussions of forthcoming interviews, advisers in all settings might engage in discussion of what claimants feel are their strengths, weaknesses, motivations and possible concerns about applying for particular vacancies – providing openings to compliment, encourage or formulate positive presentations of their claimant. This is an association found often in EZ WFIs but more rarely in Jobcentre Plus interviews.

6.10 Challenging claimants

Key points

- EZ advisers are typically unafraid to challenge claimants (for example about their disinclination to consider a certain type of work, to apply for a specific position or to take part in training programmes).
- In comparison, Jobcentre Plus advisers tend to take a more passive stance, often simply accepting claimants' reasons for not pursuing various options open to them.
- In general terms, EZ advisers' expectations of claimants seem to be higher (for instance, regarding the steps and efforts claimants might make in seeking employment).

Being generally positive about claimants did not mean that EZ advisers avoided broaching how claimants might improve in one way or another. On the contrary, they were typically unafraid to challenge claimants. The following excerpt provides a clear example of a direct challenge to a 25+ claimant's lack of interest in an appropriate vacancy. Note how the adviser not only counters the 'practical' barrier to applying for the job that the claimant raises (lack of internet access at home) but also explores and challenges the 'emotional' barrier (not wanting to work for the civil service).

Extract 6.21 [224] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: Now you've got all the skills (.) yep (0.8) and the
 2 experience (0.5) to apply for that (4.8) haven't you
 3 (1.0)
 4 Cla: Let's have another lo:o:k (1.0) er:m
 5 PA: Okay [based in ((name of town))
 6 Cla: [Erm:
 7 Cla: Mmm-hmm
 8 PA: Administrative officers up to seventeen sixte- six
 9 thousand pounds

10 Cla: Oh ye- it's only applying by the- by you- by the internet
 11 and I'm- I don't have that facility
 12 PA: Right well we have the facility here so we can do it from
 13 here then can't we
 14 Cla: Right
 15 PA: Yeah (3.4) what do you think
 16 Cla: 'I don't want to apply for the civil service thank you'
 17 PA: Tell me why
 18 (1.4)
 19 Cla: I:- it's- it's- it's going back I want to- I want to
 20 give th- le- leave that aside that de:partment does- it
 21 would- I wouldn't be- 'it wouldn't be right for me' sorry
 22 PA: Okay is there any other reason why you left the civil
 23 service then that you've not told me about (0.8) in
 24 ninety-six
 25 Cla: No (3.0)
 26 PA: .hh So you were ha- were obviously happy there because
 27 you'd been there since nineteen-eighty-five (2.3)
 28 Cla: Yes that's right
 29 PA: Yeah
 30 Cla: Yes absolutely I'm jus- ju- just reached me own en- end-
 31 end [of working there and that is
 32 PA: [Yeah it's just that if I- if it was me (and I'm) in
 33 this position
 34 Cla: I understand what you mean [yeah
 35 PA: [and I was looking for a job
 36 (2.0) and I'd got the opportunity to be earning this kind
 37 of money straight away (0.5) with the skills that I'd
 38 already got (.) .hh or going for a minimum wage somewhere
 39 else (.) I'd probably wanna do that (1.7)
 40 Cla: Mmm (1.7)
 41 PA: I just don't understand why: you don't want to apply and
 42 it's (1.0) for the civil service (1.2) the public sector
 43 Cla: Yes
 44 PA: That's what it is
 45 Cla: yes (.) yeah I-
 46 PA: Not when you've got all those skills that you can offer
 47 [to them
 48 Cla: [yes
 49 PA: And somebody else might not have
 50 Cla: Mmm
 51 PA: .hh So you could actually be in a really good position
 52 .hh to be getting an interview for that job (0.8)
 53 Cla: Mmm
 54 (4.6)
 55 PA: Do you understand what I mean
 56 Cla: Yeah absolutely absolutely I don- I don't fancy the-
 57 that- the department and th- that kind of work really
 58 that environment
 59 PA: .tch right but what you're gonna do then is we're gonna
 60 continue then to just be focussing upon (0.9) .hh a
 61 payroll (.) job in a (.) completely separate department
 62 (.) which might come up once in a blue moon (1.8)
 63 Cla: Right
 64 PA: Yeah
 65 Cla: Right (6.0)
 66 PA: .tch I see no reason why you shouldn't be applying for
 67 that job ((name of claimant)) (3.6) .tch cos you're not

68 giving me a good enough reason (0.5) than I just don't
 69 wanna work for (0.5) public sector (3.1) can you gi- give
 70 me another reason
 71 Cla: I don't want to work for the d- the department of work
 72 and pensions (1.3)
 73 PA: .tch right 'cos you didn't used to work for (0.4)
 74 Cla: No no
 75 PA: No it was [(name of office)]
 76 Cla: [That's right
 77 PA: in London
 78 Cla: That's right
 79 PA: They're completely different
 80 Cla: Oh yeah absolutely [it's-
 81 PA: [It'll be a completely different job
 82 as well
 83 Cla: Yep sure
 84 PA: (I mean) it's in administration it's the job that you
 85 wa:nt: (.) so tell me why you don't wanna go for it

This level of challenge, bordering on confrontation, is unusual, and might be considered inappropriate in some contexts, such as voluntary lone parent interviews. However, even in lone parent interviews, EZ advisers commonly challenge claimants to think differently about their job search, expanding the possibilities they might explore. In this sense, challenging often goes hand in hand with being positive about claimants, encouraging them to raise their aspirations. For example, in the following EZ lone parent interview (Extract 6.22), the adviser challenges the claimant – who has said that she abandoned her social work training, which she loved, due to pregnancy – to consider how she might still pursue this line of work. Note also how directly she challenges the claimant to consider reworking her CV (lines 22-23).

Extract 6.22 [202] Initial LP EZ (March 08)

1 PA: Okay so you can't be a social worker cos you don't
 2 have the degree?
 3 Cla: No, you've got to have, you've got to have your DIPs.
 4 PA: But could you not look into (..) supportive work?
 5 Cla: Yeah.
 6 PA: (..) That helps people?
 7 Cla: Yeah, I could do support worker or mentor role.
 ((lines omitted during which claimant tells of a support worker job that she almost got, but for which she did not have enough experience))
 8 PA: So just curious as an idea.
 9 Cla: Mm hmm.
 10 PA: Do you want to hardcore go for retail, maybe as (..) we
 11 can call it a hobby, at our appointment maybe I'll still
 12 look for some support positions?
 13 Cla: Yeah.
 14 PA: Keep our eyes peeled?
 15 Cla: Yeah, yeah, that'd be nice, yeah, if something came up
 16 that, yeah, yeah, because I mean ((charity organisation
 17 name)) although we do all the retail side of it, all our

18 volunteers are, most of them are special needs. So I've
 19 worked with both mentally and physically handicapped, and
 20 trained 'em and, you know, every day worked with them and
 21 taught them to merchandise.
 22 PA: I'm sorry you're telling me this, and why don't I know it
 23 already if I've seen your CV?
 24 Cla: Well because I suppose that's just, you're just, I'm
 25 looking at retail jobs so we just push the retail side of
 26 it really.
 27 PA: Okay
 ((further discussion about social work omitted))
 28 PA: So can you make a list of (...) charities, um places where
 29 you can get funding, places that help people, and if you
 30 make that list we can do up a, we'll do up a CV.
 31 Cla: Mm hmm.
 32 PA: We'll alter it a bit cos like you said, exactly what you
 33 said, the reason why it's not in here cos this is catered
 34 to retail, so we'll have your retail CV, then we'll have
 35 your social work CV and what we'll do is we'll do up a
 36 cover letter just stating that you've worked with the, the
 37 vulnerable, you've worked with the disadvantaged.
 38 Cla: Mm hmm.
 39 PA: You worked with it and you're really wanting to go into
 40 this line of work.
 41 Cla: Mm hmm.

Similar gentle (encouraging) challenging also occurs in the Jobcentre Plus recordings – as the following extract illustrates. The claimant's account (lines 1-10) for choosing to do a retail placement focuses on her current deficiencies (no qualifications, insufficient computer skills) and constraints on her time ('the kids'), rather than on a positive reason for wanting to go into retail. The adviser responds to this by encouraging her to think about the long term (lines 12-13). When the claimant resists this (still focusing on *the moment*, line 15), the adviser offers a more explicit challenge: for her to consider combining work with further training (lines 22-30).

Extract 6.23 [183] Subsequent NDLP JCP (January 08)

1 Cla: I'm thinking of doing a retail (0.6) placement
 2 (0.3)
 3 PA: Yea::h
 4 Cla: °co:s:° (1.3) I don't think I've got the qualifications to
 5 do °office wo:rk°
 6 (0.7)
 7 Cla: °°and I'm not°° (good on) °°computers and stu:ff so:°°
 8 (0.9)
 9 Cla: think I'll probably do re:tail the hours'll fi:t i:n with
 10 the kids (...) better
 11 (1.5)
 12 PA: But lo::ng te::rm is that what you want to do mo::re
 13 (1.1) you >know< like the computer si:::de office wo::rk
 14 (2.2)

15 Cla: At the mo:ment I just want °a jo::b°
 16 (0.6)
 17 PA: You just [want a jo::b
 18 Cla: [() °jo:b° (0.2) ()
 19 (1.0)
 20 PA: >Cos I mean< it's like anything i::t's (0.8) I mean it's
 21 ea:sy for me to say it I know it's easy for me to say it
 22 (0.1) bu::t (0.6) even if wo::rk you know there's
 23 ni::ght school and stuff you can always go [and do:
 24 Cla: [°Yea:h
 25 exact[ly°
 26 PA: [.hh stuff the::re (0.2) hm: you know if
 27 you're only working part time you should still qualify
 28 for all your fee::s paid or (.) reduced concessio::ns
 29 .hHh so you can always look at going (0.4) I've decided to
 30 take my own medicine I:: sta:rt ne:xt wee::k

Typically, however, Jobcentre Plus advisers are more cautious than their EZ counterparts, particularly with voluntary claimants. For example, in the following excerpt it is clear that the adviser believes the claimant should be attending a back-to-work programme; he pursues this option with her (lines 31-34), and challenges her account for not going – that she cannot find the money to go in every day (lines 40-44). Nevertheless, he quickly accepts both her claim to have obtained a CV through the programme (lines 23-28), and her decision not to continue attending; he does not try to sell the programme's benefits to her or to find a solution to her difficulty with paying the travel costs.

Extract 6.24 [165] Subsequent NDLP JCP (Jan 08)

1 PA: Are you still going down to t' ((back to work
 2 programme))
 3 (0.8)
 4 Cla: No:
 5 (0.8)
 6 Cla: Was I s'posed to?
 7 (0.2)
 8 PA: Yeah
 9 (0.2)
 10 PA: O:h d- oh don't know
 11 (0.8)
 12 PA: I don't know what did e::r (0.3) >just bear with me<
 13 a second
 14 (2.1)
 15 Cla: °°They never said anything to me about going ba:ck°°
 16 (0.5)
 17 PA: Did they no::t
 18 (0.4)
 19 Cla: °°No: said I c'n go do:wn if I wanted to°°
 20 (0.3)
 21 PA: Oh ri::ght (0.2) oh (well) fai:r enough then
 22 (0.7)
 23 PA: Ah w- w- d- d- did he- did you manage to get a CV
 24 together (from him)

25 (0.8)
 26 Cla: I think I got that at home
 27 (0.2)
 28 PA: Oh right that's fine
 29 (0.7)
 30 PA: That's fine providing they've done that that's fine
 ((lines omitted during which the PA conducts a brief job search))
 31 PA: tch (0.2) so: (0.2) w- y- you're at the ((back to
 32 work programme)) b- w- before you went for interview
 33 with ((company A)) a:nd (0.2) did they not ask you to
 34 come back after tha:t
 35 (1.5)
 36 Cla: °°Go back if I wanted to°°
 37 (0.2)
 38 PA: Ri::ght
 39 (0.3)
 40 Cla: 'Co:s: (0.6) °°Finding money to:: go in there every
 41 da::y (you kno:w) and I haven't go[t°° ()
 42 PA: [You don't have to
 43 go every day I should think once a week you have to
 44 go
 45 (1.6)
 46 Cla: °°Bu::t I wanna give°° () °she's
 47 staying there (0.3) on Wednes[day and I need to°
 48 PA: [mm
 49 Cla: ° watch every penny that I've got (.) [co:s: °
 50 PA: [mm
 51 (0.1)
 52 PA: °Yeah that'[s fine°
 53 Cla: [°paying off° the debt and that that I'm 54 in

There is a clear link between being directive and challenging claimants, which is well illustrated by comparing different approaches to formulating action plans. As we have seen, Jobcentre Plus advisers tend to be less directive in how they manage this task. Likewise, they tend to be less demanding of claimants. The phrase that advisers often use in Jobcentre Plus action plans, *I'll just put down...* (see Extracts 6.3, line 1; 6.10, lines 1-2; 6.11, lines 9-10; 6.25, lines 1-2), seems to reflect minimal expectations regarding claimants' search for employment (just works to minimise these expectations).

This is borne out in the following comparison. Extract 6.25 is a continuation of Extract 6.10/6.11. Here, the agreed action point is for the claimant to apply for *that vacancy* (lines 1-3) – i.e. just one vacancy between this interview and the next in two weeks' time. By contrast, in Extract 6.26 (which is a continuation of Extract 6.21) the adviser explicitly challenges the claimant's most recent job search efforts, proposing that *one [application] per fortnight's not enough* (lines 5-6).

Extract 6.25 [040] Subsequent ND25+ JCP (Aug 07)

1 PA: .t .hh (And) so as far as any agreed action I('ll)
 2 just put down that you'll apply for **that vacancy**
 3 ((name)) and er: [.hh I'll probably
 4 Cla: [Yes
 5 PA: see you in: (1.6) (right) two weeks' time (what are
 6 we at) today the: h. (0.2) ((date)) .h right in two
 7 weeks' time ((name)) if you can sign (0.2) the
 8 bottom end as usu[al
 9 Cla: [Yes
 10 PA: .hh I'm actually on holiday that week
 11 (0.5)
 12 PA: And then what I'll do is see you two weeks after
 13 that on the ((date)) of September is that okay with
 14 your good self

Extract 6.26 [224] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: .tch Okay (6.7) .h what I'd also like you to do is: erm:
 2 (.) find additional vacancies stroke application forms
 3 for the next appointment with ((name)) (.) who will then
 4 (.) do- do the same .tch .hh erm: we'll try and increase
 5 it ((claimant name)) because one per fortnight's not
 6 enough to apply for (0.8) okay you need to be doing
 7 probably six to ten per week (1.0) even if you do: what
 8 we call (.) hidden market in terms of spec-ing out your
 9 letters and your CVs
 10 (3.0)
 11 Do you get me
 12 (0.5)
 13 Cla: .tch Yes I've done- done so much of that it's very er-
 14 very des- soul destroying you hardly get any replies and
 15 er
 16 PA: I don't- well at the [end of the day
 17 Cla: [an- and they're usually negative
 18 even then [so it's: that's: you know
 19 PA: [what we need to do is (0.7) within your-
 20 within your agreement on your action planning is you need
 21 to be job ser- seeking (0.5) okay
 22 Cla: Oh yeah absolutely [absolutely
 23 PA: [.h so w- whichever (0.5) strategy we
 24 use in terms of open or hidden market (0.6)
 25 Cla: Mmm
 26 PA: Then at least we are job seeking (0.5) yeah and we're
 27 making an effort to do so to put yourself in a better
 28 position for employment
 29 Cla: Yeah
 30 PA: If we only have one application per fortnight we're not
 31 are we
 32 Cla: It doesn't mean we're not looking I- I
 33 PA: It [doesn't
 34 Cla: [yeah No
 35 PA: But however we [need to evidence that
 36 Cla: [Yeah

Although we have chosen these two examples because they offer a clear contrast, the point holds far more generally: claimants in Jobcentre Plus are almost never asked to commit to as demanding a job search programme as their EZ counterparts.

6.11 The five key features combined

In this section, we present two further contrasting examples in order to illustrate how the five key features of advisory style might work in combination during a WFI to support the claimant effectively in the job seeking process. Both are taken from subsequent WFIs with JSA claimants, in the first case on the Jobcentre Plus ND25+ programme and in the second example its EZ equivalent.

It was common for advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and EZ to spend part of the WFI searching through on-line sites advertising employment vacancies. Although by no means absolute, there were differences in how these job searches were conducted. EZ advisers were more likely to engage the claimant in a **collaborative** search effort, to be **directive** and **proactive** in helping claimants to pursue vacancies, to be **positive** about the claimant's prospects, and to **challenge** claimants to, for example, broaden their search strategies.

In both the extracts presented here, the adviser and claimant search for jobs together, and in both they identify at least one vacancy for which the claimant might apply. However, differences are apparent in the extent to which the adviser employs the five interactional or stylistic features that have been discussed in Section 6.5.

Extract 6.27 [040] Subsequent 25+ JCP (Aug 07)

1 PA: So that's (thei-) the- the list of current v:acancies
 2 we have in at the minute. .hhh what's this one at the
 3 Toyota dealership .h delivery driver required for busy
 4 service department collecting and delivering claimant
 5 ca:rs dealing with claimants must have full clean licence
 6 .hh that's six pound an hour
 7 (0.4)
 8 PA: Eight thirty till five (th-) you know the: er- (nis-) the
 9 er Toyota dealer ()
 10 Cla: .hh The one up er (.) ((place name A))
 11 (0.2)
 12 PA: Yeah: they've got a place there and they've also got a
 13 place in: er:m: (.) ((place name B)) now
 14 (.)
 15 Cla: (It-) (.) just opened up ha(s)n't it
 16 (0.2)
 17 PA: () newish one yeah [(that- that-)
 18 Cla: [Yeah
 19 PA: Yeah so I think the ((place name B)) gonna be the main one
 20 whereas this tends to deal with the used cars more
 21 (0.2)
 22 Cla: That's [right
 23 PA: [So that's delivering car:s to claimants and

24 collecting them
 25 (0.5)
 26 PA: That could be quite a- (0.3) an enjoyable
 27 job
 28 (0.2)
 29 PA: Would that interest you at all or no:
 30 Cla: Yeah (we could put-) yeah
 31 (0.3)
 32 Cla: Prin[t us that one out
 33 PA: [Give you details on that I mean they're (an-) I mean
 34 they're a good local employer
 35 Cla: Yeah
 36 (3.7)
 37 PA: And the rate of pay is: er (0.2) good as well
 ((lines omitted during which PA briefly runs through just the titles of three other vacancies))
 38 PA: .t (0.4) Not a fan:tastic choice there to be honest with
 39 you I think [that's really the: the best one we can
 40 Cla: [No:
 41 PA: look a:[t ehm
 42 Cla: [Yeah that's alright (no problem that) yeah
 43 (1.5)
 44 PA: Yeah: th- forklift licence required for that other one
 45 that's a yard warehouse person .t .hhh I'll get you the
 46 details on that one anyway an:d erm (0.2) ((clears
 47 throat)) put down that we've done a job search
 48 Cla: Yes::
 49 (13.0) ((typing))
 50 PA: I'll just save that
 51 (0.4)
 52 PA: .t .hh (And) so as far as any agreed action I('ll) just
 53 put down that you'll apply for that vacancy ((claimant
 54 name)) and er: [.hh I'll probably see you in: (1.6)
 55 Cla: [Yes
 56 PA: (right) two weeks' time (what are we at)
 57 today the: h. (0.2) ninth .h right in two weeks' time
 58 ((claimant name)) if you can sign (0.2) the bottom end as
 59 usual

A number of observations can be made about the interaction that takes place in the above extract. Reflecting upon the five features of advisory style that we have identified, we note that the adviser:

- does little to draw the claimant into jointly assessing the appropriateness of the vacancies; in response to a question from the claimant, they discuss the location of the dealership but nothing about the claimant's suitability for the job (lines 10-20);
- is non-directive (for example asks *Would that interest you at all or no?* line 29) and leaves the application process entirely up to the claimant;
- deprecates the positions available (*Not a fantastic choice there to be honest*, lines 38-41);

- treats the action plan as a piece of bureaucracy (*so as far as any agreed action I'll just put down that you'll apply for that vacancy*, lines 52-53), rather than an opportunity to motivate the claimant to pursue the vacancy that has been identified;
- provides no guidance on how the claimant might identify more vacancies between this interview and the next.

Extract 6.28 now gives a contrasting example taken from an EZ WFI.

Extract 6.28 [229] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: Duties include loading and unloading vehicles.
 2 Cla: Yeah.
 3 PA: Driving forklift trucks.
 4 Cla: Yeah.
 5 PA: Er routing vehicles, shifts, Tuesday to Saturday 6am to
 6 10am and 4pm to 8pm, split shifts.
 7 Cla: Yeah.
 8 PA: (...) Would split shifts be a problem?
 9 Cla: No problem.
 10 PA: Okay. (...) Print that one out (...) do a CV and a cover
 11 letter for that one for ((claimant's name)) before you go.
 12 Cla: All right.
 13 ((9 seconds))
 14 PA: Okay, this one is forty-four hours per week, 7.30 to 4.30
 15 (...) er Monday to Friday and you've got an 8 till 12 shift
 16 on a Saturday as well.
 17 Cla: Yeah.
 18 PA: ((Company name)) er which is a plumbing merchants.
 19 Cla: Yeah.
 20 PA: Er it says duties include dealing with receipts um for
 21 dispatch, you would be lifting and carrying heavy weights
 22 up to 200, er 25 kilograms.
 23 Cla: Yeah.
 24 PA: Is that alright?
 25 Cla: Yeah.
 26 PA: Er (...) it also says that knowledge of plumbing
 27 merchandise is an advantage.
 28 Cla: Knowledge of plumbing?
 29 PA: Yeah, just the merchant, do you know much about?
 30 Cla: See I don't have knowledge about, if they teach me.
 31 PA: Yeah, okay, it says it's an advantage, it doesn't say that
 32 it's essential.
 33 ((5 seconds)).
 ((lines omitted during which the PA identifies another vacancy for which
 the claimant might apply))
 34 PA: ((Company name)) ((person name)) the recruitment manager
 35 is dealing with a vacancy.
 36 Cla: Yeah.
 37 PA: So she's got a copy of your CV.
 38 Cla: Yeah, yeah.
 39 PA: Um what she'll need to determine firstly, I was just
 40 speaking to her while she was at the photocopier, whether
 41 it will be a problem with regards to permanent night
 42 shift, she knows that you're happy to do the rotation

43 shift, but.
 44 Cla: I can't do permanent.
 45 PA: No, no that's fine.
 46 Cla: No.
 47 PA: So she's aware of that.
 48 Cla: Yeah.
 49 PA: So she's going to find out if it's still a viable option
 50 and then we're going to put you forward for it.
 ((lines omitted during which they identify a new vacancy and discuss the
 claimant's housing benefit and how far he would be prepared to travel))
 51 PA: Now I'm going to try a different website.
 52 Cla: Right.
 ((lines omitted during which PA and claimant search through a new list of
 vacancies))
 53 PA: Er this one (...) e-mail, I can do that. I can e-mail that,
 54 and this one is CV and cover letter, so put that aside and
 55 we'll do that after the e-mails. So (...) have a look
 56 through these ones.
 57 Cla: Yeah.
 58 PA: And give them a call.
 ((Claimant makes the call))
 59 Cla: Oh hello, er can I speak to ((person's name)) please? Yeah
 60 I've just seen a vacancy for forklift driver warehouse
 61 operative,

Here, the adviser:

- engages the claimant extensively in the job search, questioning him closely about the vacancies in order to assess the 'fit' between the claimant and each job;
- works as a team, but is directive at the same time – she sets each of them tasks in following up the vacancies (see lines 54-59);
- is proactive – she gets the claimant to make a call about one of the positions there and then, will be emailing his CV to potential employers later in the interview, and has already consulted the EZ recruitment manager about this particular claimant (see lines 35-51).

Later in this same interview, the adviser also challenges the claimant to be more proactive, instructing him in methods of job searching that go beyond using the sites accessible from the EZ. This not only provides the claimant with a plan for what he might do between WFIs, but offers him a way to broaden the scope of his search, hopefully increasing the number of vacancies identified. Note how directive the adviser is, telling the claimant how often to visit an employer, how to keep a record of his job search activities, to whom he should speak, and specifically what to say. Yet even as she tells him how he could be performing better on his job search, she paints a positive picture of the claimant and his future prospects – he is someone who might 'build rapport' with potential employers, and perhaps land a job as a consequence (lines 29-37).

Extract 6.29 [229] Subsequent 25+ EZ (Apr 08)

1 PA: Um it just seems to be a lot slower than usual, so while
 2 we're keeping looking and having these job searching
 3 seconds, um sessions.
 4 Cla: Yeah.
 5 PA: Um we need to just get a little bit more proactive. On
 6 that sheet that I've given you (...) you've got a place to
 7 actually stick down the name of the person that you've
 8 spoken to and their telephone number.
 9 Cla: Yeah.
 10 PA: Um it's important because even if they don't have anything
 11 at the moment you can hand in a CV, get into a bit of a
 12 conversation with them.
 13 Cla: Yeah.
 14 PA: Um and we can call back in a couple of weeks, speak to the
 15 same person rather than just coming through to whoever.
 16 Cla: Oh yeah.
 17 PA: Um and say, look I don't know if you remember, I popped in
 18 a couple of weeks ago.
 19 Cla: Mm.
 20 PA: With regards to um any vacancies, just wondered if there
 21 was any updates.
 22 Cla: Yeah.
 23 PA: Um (...) you've got to get the balance right, we don't want
 24 to appear desperate and.
 25 Cla: Yeah.
 26 PA: Contact them every week by any means.
 27 Cla: Mm.
 28 PA: But every so often we could just touch base and make sure
 29 that nothing's came up, because if they think that you're
 30 keen and you've built up a good rapport and you've been
 31 friendly and polite with them.
 32 Cla: Yeah.
 33 PA: Then you could just get in there before they're about to
 34 put an advert in the paper.
 35 Cla: Yeah.
 36 PA: Um and get an interview and potentially get a job out of
 37 it, okay?

The adviser's guidance in this extract illustrates the combination of a number of the aspects of style that we have identified in this report. She keeps the interview on a work-focused track (she takes the opportunity to give this advice while they wait for information about vacancies to come up on the screen, lines 1-3). She maintains a collaborative stance, the partnership implied in her use of *we need* in line 5 and *we can call back* in line 14. She emphasises that importance of being proactive (line 5). She gives very practical guidance about what to do when following up a job advert (lines 7-8, and in subsequent lines). She instructs the claimant, for example, about what to say when the claimant calls back to follow up an application (for example lines 17-21). And she is directive in the advice she gives (for example, in relation to calling back after a couple of weeks, lines 14-15).

6.12 Conclusion

As noted earlier in this report, there is some evidence from employment-impact studies that EZs are more successful than comparative New Deal programmes, with respect both to immediate and sustained job outcomes (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007; Hasluck and Green, 2007). This evidence is not uniform or consistent; for instance, Griffiths and Durkin find that *'for job-ready lone parents interested in securing work, EZ help may be no more effective than that available through NDLP'* (Griffiths and Durkin, 2007, p.55). But overall, they conclude that:

'The evidence to date shows that EZs are more effective than comparative New Deal programmes in terms of their success in placing mandatory customers into work and helping them sustain employment for 13 weeks. EZs significantly outperform comparative New Deals for all mandatory customer groups, including those which have multiple employment barriers.'

(Griffiths and Durkin, 2007: 3)

It seems reasonable to attribute at least a proportion of this relative success to the effectiveness of the manner in which advisers conduct interviews in EZ offices. This would seem consonant with the conclusions reached by Griffiths *et al.* (2006), that:

'Fundamentally, satisfaction rested on the quality and content of the customer-adviser relationship. Customers consistently highlighted the one-to-one interaction at the EZ, despite the fact that this was also likely to have been the model of interaction at the Jobcentre Plus office. What differs is the way in which EZ advisers are empowered to provide practical, hands-on support throughout and through the specifics of the job-search process.'

(p.105)

Indeed many of the views expressed in that report, by 25+ and lone parent claimants, about how they valued their relationship with advisers (*(they) had been supported in achieving longer-term career goals*) are reflected in our observations here about the quality of the interaction between claimants and EZ advisers. Moreover, claimant views about EZ interviews suggest that they gain in confidence from the very practical help they receive (for example, assistance in the specifics of the job search process and hands-on support mentioned by Griffiths *et al.*).

There are, in addition, **internal** indications of the effectiveness of adviser management of interviews in EZ offices; as was explained in Chapter 2, internal markers of effectiveness can be observed during the interview, but have an uncertain association with the more usual external measures of success/effectiveness. For instance, the effectiveness of a more proactive interviewing style is reflected in the success EZ advisers have in persuading claimants to telephone an employer, to ask for an application form, to register an application or to follow up a previous enquiry or application – **during the interview itself**. Leaving claimants to contact employers, if they wish, at some point after the interview and before the next meeting, has an uncertain outcome; there is no guarantee that the claimant will

act on the advice (or action plan), especially when that advice is often expressed so conditionally (sometimes with the phrase *it's up to you*) or even by simultaneously deprecating the suitability of the position (*I don't suppose so really*).

In contrast, persuading a claimant to phone then-and-there, or constructing and mailing a CV during the interview (or at least before the claimant leaves the EZ office) has a 'measurable' success; an application is made, or followed up, or a CV is completed and even sent off to an agency or employer. These internal outcomes of EZ interviews – again, outcomes which can sometimes be found in Jobcentre Plus interviews, but only comparatively rarely – are significant steps towards a more proactive search for employment on the part of claimants.

To a greater extent than we found in Jobcentre Plus interviews, EZ advisers attempted and succeeded in encouraging claimants to broaden the kinds of employment or careers they look for. Advisers manage this in a way which often combines realism with ambition – by encouraging claimants to consider employment possibilities going beyond those they have previously considered, supported by advisers highlighting claimant skills, experiences and aptitudes. This – persuading claimants to broaden their job goals, and to have greater ambition about what they may be capable of – is another (qualitative) indicator of the effectiveness of the way advisers manage interviews, and of the relationship they build with claimants (again, reflected in the views reported by Griffiths *et al.*, 2006).

Some of the features discussed here in relation to EZ WFIs have also been illustrated in previous chapters, where we focused only on recordings made in Jobcentre Plus. For instance we showed in Section 5.6.3 that it was more effective for advisers actively to invite lone parents to join their caseload, than merely to inform them about the New Deal programme. We also reported in the same chapter (Section 5.5.5) that advisers' positive formulations of a claimant's circumstances is associated with 'turn-arounds' – persuading lone parents who initially seemed reluctant, to consider taking steps towards work in the future. The five features identified through this comparison, therefore, seem to be generally associated with the effective management of WFIs; they are neither unique to the EZ, nor are they unsuitable for implementation in Jobcentre Plus.

Indeed, we would again emphasise that the differences between Jobcentre Plus and EZ adviser style is one of degree and not of kind. The five features identified in this chapter are to be found in both Jobcentre Plus and EZ interviews. However, they are found, individually and collectively, more frequently in EZ interviews. To some extent, this may be influenced by the different organisational structures and policies that are in place. However, there might be scope for Jobcentre Plus advisers to develop (through appropriate training and guidance) more effective ways of bringing the strategies of collaboration, directiveness, proactivity, positivity and challenge into their WFI practice.

Linked to this, there seemed to be a greater tendency in Jobcentre Plus interviews for advisers to 'tick the boxes' in relation to action plans (*I'll just put down...*)

and also job searches, rather than to thoroughly and systematically explore job opportunities, and direct claimants to follow those up. Overall, there is a sense of Jobcentre Plus WFIs being more 'process-led', with advisers focused on completing the bureaucratic actions they are required to fulfil, while in EZs the impression is of an 'outcome-driven' exercise, with advisers more clearly focused on the ultimate goal of moving that claimant into work.

There was also less practical advice and direct, on the spot assistance given to claimants in Jobcentre Plus interviews. Much time was spent in Jobcentre Plus interviews giving information about benefits, programmes available, services and assistance from outside agencies, but EZ advisers managed to give similar information, whilst being more directive towards claimants in acting upon this information. In sum, although a range of 'bureaucratic' tasks has to be covered in interviews with lone parent and 25+ claimants in both settings, these can be managed in ways that – through particular styles of interacting with claimants – encourage claimants to take practical steps focused on moving towards work.

7 Process-led and claimant-focused approaches to tasks in the Work Focused Interview

7.1 Introduction

In previous chapters we have focused on particular claimant groups. This has allowed us to examine features of the interactions that are group-specific (for example, explanations of the Pathways to Work programme for Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants, talking with lone parents about childcare, or different ways of asking new jobseekers about their job goals). Running through these studies, however, is a central theme: that, despite the numerous constraints within which all advisers work, **how** they carry out the required tasks is not fully determined by policy, training, quality frameworks, targets, computerised forms, 'must-do' lists, the length of a Work Focused Interview (WFI), or other 'organisational' factors (see e.g. Nunn and Kelsey, 2007). Of course these all play an important role and are rightfully the subject of rigorous research attention. This study, however, was commissioned to focus specifically on the detail of the adviser-claimant interaction. In doing so, we have found a central distinction in adviser approach to the tasks of the WFI: advisers may take a more process-led or a more claimant-focused approach.

A **process-led approach** involves a primary focus on the procedural requirements of the WFI, on filling in the required fields on the computer and delivering standardised information according to the computer codes. The requirements associated with conditionality, for instance, can result in advisers being primarily concerned to 'tick the boxes', without exploring claimants' individual needs and circumstances more fully. For example:

- information gathering tends to be accomplished predominantly through checklist-style questioning;

- information delivery tends to be done according to a standard 'script';
- there is comparatively minimal opportunity for claimant input.

By contrast, a **claimant-focused approach** involves a primary focus on empowering the claimant to move towards the kind of work they want. From the adviser's perspective, this means going beyond ticking the boxes, to offer a more personalised service; the aim is to encourage the claimant to do what it takes to get (back) into work, rather than what is required to remain eligible for benefit. This includes supporting claimants to undertake whatever steps towards work are appropriate to their circumstances. In some cases (especially for those claiming IB or Income Support (IS)), work itself may be a long-term goal. Nevertheless, claimants may be supported to prepare themselves in the meantime. Because the main focus is on helping the individual to become job ready, tasks tend to be conducted in a tailored fashion. For example:

- information gathering tends to be accomplished through the use of open questions, designed to elicit the claimant's preferences, goals, and history;
- information delivery tends to be tailored around what the claimant has revealed about his/her circumstances.
- claimants are typically given plenty of opportunity to contribute their 'story'.

These are not absolute differences, but represent a continuum. How an adviser approaches a particular task may be more or less process-led or claimant-focused. Moreover, although we found that advisers tend, generally, to favour one approach over the other, no adviser is always process-led or always claimant-focused when performing every task. So there are no examples of fully 'process-led'/'claimant-focused' **interviews** or **advisers** in our dataset. Rather, there are numerous examples of different tasks being performed in either a process-led or claimant-focused fashion. Any task may be done using either approach, and both approaches tend to be used by all advisers, for different tasks, even in the same interview.

In this chapter we highlight this central finding by examining three key tasks that are common across interviews, rather than being group-specific. These are:

- gathering information (Section 7.2);
- informing the claimant about work-directed activities, services and support (Section 7.3);
- agreeing what the claimant will do next (Section 7.4).

For each, we illustrate the distinction between taking a process-led or claimant-focused approach to the given task, using comparative examples drawn from across the different WFI types. Each pair of examples is matched with respect to the kinds of task the adviser is undertaking in order to highlight how the task itself does not determine how it is performed. Where appropriate, we include examples from previous chapters to illustrate how the central theme discussed here links

to the specific analyses reported in other sections. Although highlighting the significant risks of a process-led approach, we argue that both approaches are required for an effective WFI.

7.2 Gathering information

Key points

- Information gathering in WFIs is computer-based, with codes that advisers are required to complete; the computer embodies 'the process'.
- Yet advisers may take a more process-led or a more claimant-focused approach to information gathering.
- When explaining why they need to obtain information, advisers may focus on the 'bureaucratic' requirements of the WFI or on the claimant's circumstances and needs.
- When questioning claimants, advisers sometimes use a checklist style, reading the questions off the screen, inviting short, specific answers; or a more discursive style, asking more open questions, which invite a claimant's 'story'.
- When inputting information to the claimant's record, advisers may visibly focus on the form rather than the claimant, spending protracted periods typing in silence; or they may invite the claimant to play an active role in determining what information is recorded.

7.2.1 Introduction

A central requirement for any WFI is to elicit information from the claimant. At minimum, the adviser needs to complete (or update) the claimant's record, including contact details, living arrangements, and education and employment history. Some group-specific information is also required, as we have seen in previous chapters. For example, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants may be asked about their willingness to work shifts or nights (see Section 3.3.3), lone parents are often asked to provide information about their financial situation for a Better Off Calculation (BOC) (see Section 5.3) and, at the time of recording, IB claimants were asked a range of questions about their health and work history for the purposes of screening for eligibility on the Pathways to Work programme (see Section 4.4).

Information gathering during WFIs is computer-based, with codes to complete, specific types of information to obtain, and only certain allowable answers (determined, for example, by drop-down menus, codes or a limited number of characters for free text). To a large extent, the computer embodies the process. So it is particularly striking that advisers' approaches to information gathering are not fully determined by the computer. Despite working within the same constraints, advisers sometimes take a more process-led approach, and sometimes a more claimant-focused one to the task of information gathering.

There are three key aspects to information gathering in our dataset:

- explaining the need for information.
- asking questions.
- inputting information.

In the following sections we show how each may be done in a more process-led or claimant-focused fashion.

7.2.2 Explaining the need for information: for the sake of the system or the claimant?

As we have seen in relation to the Pathways screening tool (Section 4.4) and the use of BOCs with lone parents (Section 5.3.2), advisers may explain why they will be asking the claimant questions in two main ways: either by referring to the 'bureaucratic' requirements of the WFI, or with reference to the claimant. The former epitomises a process-led approach in that the primary focus is on the boxes that have to be completed; the information is being gathered *for the system that we use* (Task 7.1). The latter epitomises a claimant-focused approach in that the primary focus is on the claimant in one way or another. For example, in the second column, below, the focus is on eliciting the claimant's story (Task 7.1), or on how the information requested will be used to help the claimant (Task 7.2 and 7.3). Although illustrating a separate point, the extracts in Task 7.5 also highlight this contrast: in the first column, the adviser states explicitly that they will start out by *filling in some boxes*; in the second, the adviser emphasises that they will be talking about the claimant's work plans.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|--|
| <i>Task 7.1: Introducing the Pathways screening tool</i> | |
| Alright so I just ask you a- a few questions just gather a bit more information um just for the system that we use [Initial IB, 144] | What I'd like to do start off wi::th i:s: u:m (1.2) ju::s:t find out a bit about yourse::lf [Initial IB, 116] |
| <i>Task 7.2: Introducing the BOC in lone parent interviews</i> | |
| The only other thing I need to do today is do a quick calculation cos we have to do one in every single interview we do, that shows you what potentially you could get if you took a job... Right, single, and your date of Birth is [Initial LP, 087] | We're gonna do a better off calculation for you... if you were a::ble to do:: sixteen hours a wee::k... it could be that by claiming Working Tax Credit and gaining this extra money it's gonna help you with the problems that you've got sort of financially... So let's have a look then and see what, what we come up with. Your date of birth again please [Review LP, 172] |
| <i>Task 7.3: Introducing the need for background information in NJIs</i> | |
| Right I'm just gonna gather a (0.2) bit more background detail about you fi::rst.=If you ignore the bit in blu::e .hhhh I'm gonna go through a series of questions here [067; NJI, 18-24] | I will be asking you a few pe::rsonal questions though ((cus name)) but (.) it's in the:: (0.4) interests of trying to help you fi:nd employment [054; NJI, 18-24] |

A focus on the process during information gathering is also evident in how advisers ask claimants about their job goals. It was common for advisers to emphasise the bureaucratic requirements (*we need to put some job goals on here...we would need something else as well*, Task 7.4) rather than what the claimant actually wants, and is qualified, to do. For example, in the first column, below, the adviser seeks a 'back-up' goal that is unrelated to the claimant's aspirations and qualifications.³⁹ By contrast, in the second column, even though the adviser could easily have met the requirements of the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) by entering 'retail', he instead encourages the claimant to pursue her long-term goals (based on the discussion that they have had earlier in the interview). His focus is on the claimant, not on filling in the boxes.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|---|
| <i>Task 7.4: Agreeing job goals with new jobseekers</i> | |
| PA: We need- we need to put some job goals on he::re | PA: So you've got <u>call</u> centre agent you've got <u>trainee</u> clerical administra:tor, .hh (0.2) what about a <u>thi:rd</u> job goal. |
| Cla: Okay (1.6) | Cla: .hhhh u:::m: hm I could do: hh. (0.2) shop work 'cos I'm <u>really</u> good at that (.)... |
| Cla: U:::m graphic design uh magazine design (0.8) u::m | Cla: B[ut |
| PA: Graphic design and magazine design ri::gh | PA: [But- but you've <u>already</u> experienced retail: l (.) and you've got your IC[T |
| ... | Cla: [Yeah |
| PA: A::nythi:ng else I mean yuh- (0.6) f:i:ne the graphic design that's what you've worked hard to get to, you've got the qualifications, | PA: qualifications ... do you want to fo::cus o:n developing white collar skills... 'Cos don't feel as you've got to mo:ve b[ack into re:tail |
| Cla: Yea[h | Cla: [Mm:: Huh ha yea::h (h)I know [.hh yeah |
| PA: [.hhhh and some experience- (.) | PA: [It's about <u>what</u> you want to be: you're only eighteen (0.2) you're starting to think about <u>building</u> a career now= |
| Cla: Ju[st (those-) just that | ... |
| PA: [absolutely marvellous (0.2) | PA: Is clerical higher up on the list than retail |
| PA: Yeah (.) u:::m (0.4) we would nee::d s:::omething else as we::ll (0.4) u::m as a back up to that at lea:st one more job goa:l. | Cla: It <u>is</u> a l[ot higher u[p |
| ... | PA: [.tch [Well |
| Cla: U:::m (1.0) .tch (0.6) photography? | if it's a lot higher let's not put re:tail down because [that's going back down |
| ... | Cla: [Yeah |
| PA: <u>Hopefully</u> a thi::rd option as well. (3.0) | PA: [the ladder O::kay? |
| Cla: U:::m: (4.0) phhhhhh tshh tshh | Cla: [Ha huh huh I kno:w |
| PA: Tell you what we'll do.=I'll start typing things in about what you've <u>already</u> picked while you::'re mulling that one over | [054; NJI 18-24] |
| [067; NJI 18-24] | |

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See also Sections 3.3.4 and 3.6.2 for further discussion of this example.

7.2.3 Questioning style: checklist or discursive?

A more process-led or claimant-focused approach to information gathering is also clearly evident in how advisers word the questions they ask. A process-led approach typically entails using a checklist style of questioning. The questions tend to be (more or less) read off the screen, often in a series, inviting short, specific answers. As Task 7.7 illustrates, this approach may be used even when a series of questions is not in progress. The key feature is a focus on the form to be completed. By contrast, a claimant-focused approach tends to involve the use of a more discursive questioning style; the questions are more open, inviting the claimant's 'story'. This contrast was particularly apparent near the start of initial IB and lone parent interviews (see Tasks 7.5 and 7.6). In some cases advisers began with a series of checklist-style questions; in others they began with an open question, inviting the claimant to describe their circumstances in their own words.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|---|
| <i>Task 7.5: Initial questioning in IB interviews</i> | |
| PA: I've put in some (0.2) some of the details I already know about you but I need to ask you a few more .hhh do you have any children under the age of sixteen (0.4) | PA: I know you've got (medical condition)... cos that's on your Medical Certificate but I- I (.) don't know (0.2) very much else about you at all... so (0.3) could you tell me a- (.) u::m (0.4) how that affects you |
| Cla: Yeah | Cla: U::m (0.5) it's (0.2) means that I have varying amounts of energy (0.2) |
| ... | PA: °°ri[:ght°° |
| PA: .h Do they: (0.2) do they: live with you (0.7) | Cla: [but u::m (0.5) some of the time I just feel completely no:rmal ... ((continues)) |
| Cla: No | [116; Initial IB] |
| ... | |
| PA: .hh So before you made your claim to Incapacity Benefit were you on Jobseeker's Allowance is that right... ((continues)) | |
| [013; Initial IB] | |
| <i>Task 7.6: Initial questioning in Lone Parent WFs</i> | |
| PA: Erm, now because this is the first time we've met, I've got to set up a lot of information on our computer... Just so we've got a record of what we've discussed... So bear with me if I just go through a few random questions, it's just about filling in some boxes first of all. So can I just check your address first of all ((claimant confirms details)) | PA: So- the whole point of the Interview really is just to kind of talk to you about (.) what your future plans are... what I'm looking to do >is kind of talk to you about (.) you know what you're planning to do as far as< you know (0.2) going into work's concerned. in the future... depending on what's happening* .hhh with yourself. >.hh< Now- (.) why are you making your claim today ((name))? |
| PA: Right, so starting at the top. Do you drive? | |
| Cla: No | |

Continued

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|---|
| <p>PA: When did you last work? Cla: Seven year ago ... ((PA obtains work history)) PA: Right, that's fine. Erm, your house, is it rented? Cla: Yes it is. ((Continues in similar vein)) [094; Initial LP]</p> <p><i>Task 7.7: Asking about claimants' job goals in NJIs</i></p> <p>Type of work that you're looking for at the moment [026; NJI 18- 24]</p> | <p>Cla: I've just split up with my boyfriend, ((Adviser and claimant discuss the claimant's current housing difficulties)) [030; Initial LP]</p> <p>What is your main job goal is it going to be u:m (0.8) .tch u::h a shop operative retail operative: (0.2) what would you like to do [054; NJI 18-24]</p> |

7.2.4 Inputting information: silence or collaboration?

How advisers input information to the claimant's record makes the distinction between a process-led and claimant-focused approach particularly visible. For example, they often turn their attention away from the claimant to spend protracted periods typing in silence. Thus, the focus is visibly on the computer rather than the claimant. By contrast, advisers sometimes invite the claimant to play an active role in determining what information is recorded.

For example, as we saw in Section 6.6, when completing an action plan with lone parents, advisers may type this in relative silence (see first column of Task 7.8, below), or they may actively include the claimant by asking them to confirm the information being entered (see second column of Task 7.8). Similar comparisons are to be found in New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs), where advisers are completing a JSAg. For example, in Task 7.9, the first claimant is only invited to endorse, or change, what has been entered once the adviser has completed the whole document (the typing being done in relative silence). Despite indicating he finds it difficult to scan for errors (*I can't spot them out*), no further discussion is held about the content of the agreement before the claimant signs it. By contrast, the second adviser talks the claimant through the details of what has been entered before inviting her endorsement (*does that sound reasonable*). The claimant's repeated confirmations demonstrate her active engagement with the information on the adviser's screen.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|---|
| <i>Task 7.8: Constructing an action plan with caseloaded lone parent claimants</i> | |
| PA: I'm just gonna put on uh your action plan then... that you'll attend a further appointment... (18.8) ((typing)) | PA: Um (...) has a CV, right? |
| PA: ((inaudible; speaking to Self while typing)) oops ha ha (10.8) ((typing)) | Cla: Yeah. |
| PA: .tch Okay (10.8) ((typing)) | PA: Um would like updating, and that's not updating what you have in there, just updating the marketing of it, right? |
| PA: Just get that off the printer for you (23.0) | Cla: I do need to change the fact that it does say currently on me ((company name)) I need to change it to Feb. |
| PA: (Here again) this is just your updated action plan ((claimant name)) (1.8) | ... |
| PA: And your updated action point is obviously you've agreed to attend a further (0.4) appointment with myself okay? | PA: Yeah, er bring CV to ((company name))? |
| Cla: [Mhm (0.2)] | Cla: Yeah. |
| PA: So you just sign (it) [170; Subsequent NDLP, JCP] | PA: Is that right? |
| | Cla: Yeah. |
| | ... |
| | PA: So next appointment will review and update CV and start job searching. |
| | Cla: Mm hmm. |
| | [200; Initial LP; EZ] |
| <i>Task 7.9: Agreeing a JSAg during NJIs</i> | |
| PA: Anything else on there that you want to add on (0.2) or take off (or) change at all (0.4) | PA: So you're looking for Retail... and shelf-stacking. So that's the [general kind of areas |
| PA: Typing errors spelling mistakes you just | Cla: [Yeah |
| Cus No= | PA: you're looking for... You're looking in the ((Evening Newspaper)). You're gonna visit the Jobcentre twice a week. Er and as well as that erm you're gonna enrol on a ((provider)) programme if it seems suitable for what you want to get some extra work experience .hh for retail work. |
| PA: =can't bear [to live with | Cla: Yeah |
| Cla: [I can't spot them out (.) | PA: Does that sound reasonable. |
| PA: Right [okay then | Cla: Yeah [078; NJI 18-24] |
| Cla: [(a mile off) .hh (0.3) | |
| PA: Alright okay then what we'll do is (.) print that on there [026; NJI 18-24] | |

In some cases claimants were not given any explicit opportunity to view, or comment on, their record. The contrast in Task 7.10 illustrates this clearly. In both, the adviser and claimant have discussed the claimant's health condition, which includes a physical complaint and depression. In the first, the adviser gives no indication as to what she is entering on the computer. In the second, the adviser explicitly informs the claimant of what she has typed, and checks that she is happy with it. It should be noted, however, that the approach an adviser takes to the discussion itself may be very different to their approach to data entry. For example, in the first case in Task 7.10, the adviser had taken a very claimant-

focused approach to talking about the claimant's situation, providing plenty of opportunity to talk through her history, current health status, and future plans. It is only when the adviser turns to use the computer that she becomes focused on 'filling in the boxes' instead of involving the claimant in what she is doing.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Task 7.10: Inputting information about IB claimants' circumstances</i> | |
| PA: So you y- wh- (.) when I said to you about (.) (when) you- w- why you were off it was your han:d and you also said depression as [well: | PA: .hh Now- you told me that you:: (0.4) are depress::ed [as a |
| Cla: [°Mm° (0.2) | Cla: [Mhm |
| PA: S:o: tell me a little [bit about your depression | PA: result of your (.) illness would you: (.) want that put do::wn or- uh- is- |
| Cla: [I've had depression sinc:e the beginning of (the) pregnancy:... | Cla: Yea::h [I- I'm not |
| ((Much later in the interview))... | PA: [Yeah I mean- (.) |
| PA: I just need to put some information into this:: computer (0.2) | Cla: bothered about you know I'm not- (1.8) embarrassed or anything about it so |
| Cla: When (they) decide to work (1.2) | ... |
| PA: .h I hate them (3.2) ((typing)) | PA: .hhh I've put tha:t you've got fibromyalgia osteoarthritis and depression. (1.0) |
| Cla: Got to be better than filling out a mountain of paperwork (0.5) | Cla: Oh yeah |
| PA: But you still get the mountain of paperwork to do as well (1.2) | PA: Alrigh[t? is that oka::y? |
| Cla: Ah ri[ght | Cla: [Yea(h)h huh ha |
| PA: [((laughs)) | [127; Initial IB] |
| [036; Initial IB] | |

7.3 Informing the claimant about work-directed activities, services and support

Key points

- Advisers regularly inform claimants both about the steps they might take towards work and of the various services and incentives available to support their back-to-work journey.
- Advisers may describe such work-directed services and activities as 'required' by the benefits system or as an opportunity for the individual.
- They may also provide information in a standardised way (where the same information could be given to any claimant) or in a tailored way (where the information is fitted to the claimant's individual circumstances).

7.3.1 Introduction

Although it is recognised that claimants may be at very different stages of job readiness,⁴⁰ the overall objective of the WFI regime is to support claimants in returning to work at some point. A second key task of the WFI, then, is to provide claimants with information about how they might achieve this. Advisers regularly inform claimants both about the steps they might take towards work, and of the various services and incentives available to support their back-to-work journey. For the (almost) job ready, these include drop-in centres providing internet access, help with job search, CV development, stationery and postage costs, and so forth. For those needing additional support, services such as the Condition Management Programme for IB claimants, and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) for lone parents, may be discussed. Funding for work-directed training is also sometimes available, as are a range of financial back-to-work incentives.

How advisers talked with claimants about these various forms of support varied considerably depending on what they were describing. However, the distinction between a process-led and claimant-focused approach once again clarifies the central underlying differences. These are:

- an emphasis on ‘requirements’ as opposed to ‘opportunities’;
- the provision of standardised as opposed to tailored information.

7.3.2 Requirements or opportunities?

In Section 7.2.2, we illustrated how advisers may explain the need to obtain information from claimants with reference either to the ‘bureaucratic’ requirements of the WFI or with reference to the claimant. Similarly, advisers may describe work-directed services/activities as ‘required’ by the benefits system or as an ‘opportunity’ for the individual.

For example, as we saw in relation to Pathways screening decisions (Section 4.5), advisers sometimes presented further interviews as more of a penalty than an opportunity for claimants. By emphasising that claimants ‘have’ or ‘need’ to attend further interviews, they treated the interviews as an imposition, as a bureaucratic constraint. Of course it is true that Pathways interviews were mandatory at the time of recording and that claimants need to understand what is required of them. However, when first introducing such programmes, there is scope for advisers to take a more claimant-focused approach – by emphasising the advantages to the individual – rather than focusing on the demands of the benefits system. Compare, for example, telling a claimant that they may be ‘brought in for a series of interviews’ with explaining that *there are opportunities available* to IB claimants (in Task 7.11). In the former case, even as the adviser emphasises the absence of

⁴⁰ Claimants in our dataset ranged from those who were too physically or mentally unwell to attend the WFI without a carer, to those who had already found a job. However, it was rare for claimants in any group to say they had no intention of working again.

'pressure', he is highlighting the mandatory nature of the interviews, rather than how they might benefit the claimant.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|---|
| <i>Task 7.11: Informing IB claimants about Pathways to Work</i> | |
| It can, the programme itself, the, the Pathways programme can mean that you can either be brought in for a series of interviews or it'll be a one-off interview today, depending on the information we get from today's interview... We're not here to pressurise you to do anything... Um everything that we can offer people is voluntary, so there's no pressure apart from just attending the interviews really [081; Initial IB] | I:n this area we- (0.1) we:'re known as a Pathways to Wo::rk area... a:::nd (0.2) I don't think it wa:s whe:::re you: were living befo:::re .hhh and there a:re opportunities avai:lable to people living here (who're) on Benefi::t that w- I need to tell you abou::t [116; Initial IB] |

The same distinction is evident in how advisers talk about other mandatory work-directed activities, such as the job search steps that new jobseekers are required to undertake and keep a record of. Again, while claimants need to understand that this is mandatory, advisers sometimes explained how the record might help the individual in their job search, rather than focusing on how the record is required by Jobcentre Plus (see 7.12).

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Task 7.12: Informing new jobseekers about keeping a record of their jobsearch activities</i> | |
| Um okay, you have to keep a record of what you've been doing to look for work... Um so you can use that or you keep your own records, whatever's easiest for you... Um just bring it in with you come to sign... As long as they can see you're making an effort, that's all they're worried about. And like I say, with you being pregnant obviously um ((claimant's name)) not your fault if if you're not going to get a lot of erm interviews or or job job offers um but as long as you're trying and applying that's all they're worried about [109; NJI 18-24] ¹ | What we can do is give you this little booklet thing where you can just write them [the vacancies] all down along the way... And it saves you having to keep all the little bits of paper and stuff like that. Like I say, if you put down who it is you contacted, when you did it and what happened, then if they do phone back and they give you an interview and things like that at least you know who it is you were talking to... And what the job's about. Also it comes in useful because, for example, if you do talk to somebody and they say, we're going to send an application form out or things like that, well obviously if you make a note of your expecting the application form, if it doesn't come you can ring them up and say "Oh er me application form hasn't come, can you send another one?" ... you're keeping the record yourself so to remind you what you're doing [085; NJI 25+]. |

¹ See also Section 3.4.3 for further discussion of this example.

7.3.3 Standardised or tailored information?

A regular theme across the claimant-specific chapters has been the distinction between standardised and tailored information provision. Standardised information giving – often accompanied by an official leaflet – involves giving the claimant information that could have been given to anyone. This is process-led in that the adviser has met a key requirement of the WFI: to ensure the claimant is aware of what they might do to find work and/or of the available work-directed services. It is not claimant-focused, since the adviser has not built into the discussion any consideration of how the information applies to the individual's needs.

For example, when completing a JSaG with new jobseekers, advisers sometimes gave them standardised information about the steps they might take to find work, even when it was clear that the claimant had tried one or more of these without success (see Section 3.4.1). By contrast, as Task 7.13 illustrates, advisers might tailor the information to the claimant's specific job goals. Similarly, when describing the back-to-work incentives available to IB claimants, advisers often listed a range of options in relatively quick succession, with minimal reference to how the options might fit the claimant's circumstances. Again, the right-hand column below shows a contrasting example. The adviser not only provides the relevant information about return-to-work credit, but highlights how this could assist the claimant in returning to work part-time. We have included a more extended extract here in order to show how positively the claimant responds.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Task 7.13: Informing JSA claimants about how to look for work</i> | |
| Now how you contact people is entirely up to yourself I mean you can obviously phone people up you can send them letters you can visit them .hh you can even do it through ourselves [026; NJI 18-24] | For the type of work you're looking for the butcher and the factory worker in particular you really need to think about registering with some agencies because a lot of that work goes through agencies [069; NJI 25+] |
| <i>Task 7.14: Informing IB claimants about return to work credit</i> | |
| PA: So, as I say, these are all to think of in the future Cla: Yeah PA: When the time's right for you. Um you'd be referred to them through us, and depending on what you wanted to do would depend which broker that we sent you to. There's um a Return, what we call a Return to Work Credit, that's a new tax free payment of £40 a week. The conditions of that are that you've got to have been on a benefit for thirteen weeks. You um, the, the hours have to be sixteen hours or more a week, and you have to earn less than 15,000 a week, a, a year sorry, if it was 15,000 a week I'd be applying for it meself | PA: ... because um of claiming Incapacity Benefit there are a few things that are available to you as an Incapacity Benefit claimant who is going to be going into work okay? And um once you've been claiming benefit for thirteen weeks okay... you come off benefit and you go back to work over sixteen hours and um your earnings are 15,000 pounds or less okay you can be entitled to something call the return to work credit okay. And that's forty pounds a week tax free for a year. So that's an extra two grand Cla: Mm very nice yes PA: that you get before you get out of bed in the morning which is very nice isn't it |

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|--|
| <p>((laughs)) and it's £40 a week for a year, OK? (..) The other, choice three is about Condition Management, I've got a separate booklet about that so I'll give, I'll go through that one separately for you. This one is about permitted work. This is under sixteen hours a week, so you've got something there for under sixteen hours.</p> <p>Cla: Yeah.</p> <p>((continues with further information provision in similar vein)) [012; initial IB]</p> | <p>Cla: Yes yeah</p> <p>PA: Okay so that's paid for fifty-two weeks</p> <p>Cla: Cru::mbs ...</p> <p>PA: so in your circumstance you could say "okay well you know forty quid's probably about a day's work by the time you know take the tax off"</p> <p>Cla: Mm:: mm</p> <p>PA: "So actually: instead of going three or four days I could do maybe two days" ...</p> <p>PA: Which means you could look at going back and sort of having a bigger break</p> <p>Cla: Yes that would- I must admit that would take a little bit of the strain off because I didn't really want to rush into... you know sort of four days a week</p> <p>PA: absolutely not...</p> <p>Cla: so that would be brilliant thank you very much thank you [108; Initial IB]</p> |

In the final example (Task 7.15), we see a comparable set of examples from two initial lone parent interviews. In the first, the adviser simply provides the standard information about help with childcare costs should the claimant return to work. In the second, the adviser tailors the information to address a potential barrier to work that they discussed earlier in the interview: the claimant's mother, who is currently willing to provide childcare, is also looking for work, and so may be unavailable in the future (see also Section 5.4.3).

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|--|
| <i>Task 7.15: Informing lone parent claimants about help with childcare costs</i> | |
| <p>If you have to use childcare, if you're getting Working Tax Credit you can claim up to eighty per cent of that childcare. Okay.</p> <p>[094; Initial LP]</p> | <p>So:: if you were considering work then° (1.6) a:nd your mum got a job (0.6) you know and so she couldn't look a:fter (0.4) your daughter... and you had to get a child minder to look after her or something like that, and you were doing I don't know three days a week or something... it would cost you seventy fi:ve pounds a week (.) .hh but you'd get (.) eighty per cent towa:rds that (0.2) in a working tax credit world [132; Initial LP]</p> |

7.4 Agreeing what claimants will do next

Key points

- Part of the adviser's role is to help claimants establish an action plan – to agree on certain steps they might take towards work or greater job readiness.
- In agreeing what claimants will do next, advisers may emphasise the conditions of claiming benefit, or they may emphasise what is really needed for the claimant to become job ready.
- Advisers may also focus purely on delivering the relevant information (e.g. about how a claimant may search for work or what support is available); or they may provide information and explicitly invite the claimant to commit to performing the activity.

7.4.1 Introduction

In addition to informing claimants about how they might progress their back-to-work journey, part of the adviser's role is to help claimants establish an action plan – to agree on certain steps that they might take towards work or, at least, towards greater job readiness. In the case of NJIs, this is mandatory: claimants have to sign a JSAg, agreeing the job search steps they will undertake. For lone parents and IB claimants, the only requirement is to attend any future mandatory interviews. However, advisers still often construct an action plan, which may include voluntary activities, such as attending an external service provider, obtaining further information about childcare, or investigating training opportunities.

In seeking claimants' commitment to taking steps towards work, the distinction between a process-led and claimant-focused approach is again pertinent, and is apparent in two main contrasts in how advisers dealt with this task:

- whether they emphasised the conditions of claiming benefit or what was needed for the claimant to become job ready; and
- whether they only provided the claimant with information or provided information and explicitly invited claimants to commit to performing an activity.

7.4.2 Conditionality or job readiness?

As we saw in Section 3.4.2, advisers tend to take a process-led approach when asking JSA claimants to agree to undertake certain job search steps. As illustrated in the first column of Task 7.16, the adviser's focus is on the benefit system, on what is expected of the claimant in order to remain eligible. By contrast, the right-hand column illustrates a more claimant-focused approach: the adviser explains the purpose of the activity he is suggesting (registering with seven employment agencies) with reference to the claimant's goal, which they have just been discussing: to move quickly into office work (rather than return to retail).

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|--|
| <i>Task 7.16: Advising JSA claimants on how to find work</i> | |
| <p>It ((the record of jobseeking)) doesn't need to be anything elaborate just the basics yeah, ... we would expect you to be contacting at least two employers a week to look- look for work yeah,... .tch a::nd to contact us twice a week (0.4) using these methods we've already talked about here [067; NJI 18-24]</p> | <p>Now- I'm gonna make a suggestion and don't (0.8) u::m panic when I say this at least seven employment agencies register with .hh the mo:re employment agencies your register with ((claimant name)) the quicker you will be in work because a lot of employers: will (.) u:m register specifically with one employment agency .hh (.) example being British telecom (0.4) mainly register with Manpower .hhh a::nd they've been with them for years and they're happy with that relationship so if you're not with Re- u::m Manpower (0.6) you w- you may not hear for those vacancies [054; NJI 18-24]</p> |

This difference in emphasis is also apparent in how advisers discussed steps towards work with lone parents and IB claimants. Although they routinely provided claimants with information about the back-to-work services and incentives available, when it came to agreeing what claimants might do next, they tended to focus on what was required for the claim to continue: simple attendance at any subsequent mandatory interviews. Voluntary participation in programmes or activities that might help the claimant prepare for future work was regularly deferred (see also Section 4.7).

By contrast, advisers sometimes focused on the claimant's job readiness rather than on what they had to do to continue claiming benefit. For example, in Task 7.17 both claimants want to wait until their child is in nursery before looking for work. However, in the first example, the adviser defers any discussion of what the claimant might do to prepare for work in the meantime, foregrounding the fact that she is not required to seek work. In the second, the adviser also, appropriately, accepts that the claimant will not be looking for work immediately. However, she explicitly suggests that the claimant consider ways of making herself more attractive to an employer, so that she might get the work she wants when she is ready to apply. This leads to a detailed discussion about training opportunities (data not shown).

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|--|--|
| <i>Task 7.17: Talking with lone parents about voluntary steps towards work</i> | |
| PA: What are you thinking you might do, 'I mean' are you looking for work[, at the m[oment. | PA: What about work then: what's: the situation ther:e [(the) possibilities or |
| Cla: [>.hh< [No not at the (minute me) (0.3) | Cla: [Er: (0.2) when (.) er- hopefully w- obviously when she starts nursery I'll start |
| PA: .l Right. | PA: Mhm |
| Cla: ((Child's name)) (.) s:he's only one 'n a half s[o | Cla: But at- at the minute (it's) not- (.) (it's) not a chance ... |
| PA: [Ri[ght. | PA: Right so: (.) the only thing I:'d look at with you then is::: ehm: long-term you were sayin:g you wanted to look at (0.2) care assistant ... |
| Cla: [Once she's in nursery or som[ething () | PA: So (0.5) what we'd normally look at is:: (0.5) is there anything you can be doing in the meantime(0.3) to get yourself prepa:red for that so that .h you know when the time's right you've got [the best chanc::e of |
| PA: [.hh Yeah. (0.1) | Cla: [Yeah |
| Cla: then probably y[eah ... | PA: getting the sort of work you want to do [092; Review LP] |
| PA: That's fair enough. .hh As you kno:w (.) basically .hh (0.2) when you're claiming income support< there is no requirement (.) for you to look for work. | |
| Cla: Ye[ah. | |
| PA: [.hh- Ehm it's entirely up to you. .hh We are here (0.1) to help you (.) when you (.) want to take some steps to moving back (.) towards work. [030; Initial LP] | |

7.4.3 Information only or an explicit invitation?

As we showed in Section 7.3.3, by providing standardised information advisers meet the basic requirements of their role, but do not necessarily demonstrate the relevance of that information to the claimant's specific circumstances. Likewise, as we showed in relation to both NDLP caseloading (see Section 5.6.3) and the construction of a JSAg (see Section 3.4.4), advisers may inform claimants about the various options available to them, but not take the next, more personalised, step of asking the claimant to specify what they would find useful. For example, in Task 7.18, the first case shows information provision only: the adviser simply tells the claimant about her options. In the second case, the adviser explicitly asks the claimant whether she would find it useful to join her caseload. Similarly, in Task 7.19, the first adviser informs the claimant of what she is expected to do to look for work, whereas the second invites the claimant to choose her preferred option and to specify how often she will visit Jobcentre Plus to look for vacancies.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|---|
| <i>Task 7.18: Discussing voluntary back-to-work activities with lone parents</i> | |
| <p>PA: .hhh Eh:m (0.3) your other op:tion (.) i:s: that you are eligible for trainin::g (0.4) through our (0.3) training providers... so (0.4) it's en:ti:rely up to you really you know (.) which way you want to go ... you can leave it until the time's right and just start looking for jobs you know i- if if that's your decision</p> <p>PA: [but .hhh all I'm here for</p> <p>Cla: [Yeah</p> <p>PA: is: you [know to give you</p> <p>Cla: [To advise yeah</p> <p>PA: the (yeah) (0.4) the advice [092; subsequent LP]</p> | <p>PA: Even though you've started to look for work on, on your own accord ((claimant's name)) do you feel you would find any benefit to yourself for me to help you with your job search by participating on, on my caseload?</p> <p>Cla: Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>...</p> <p>PA: So what, what I would like to do, if it's all right with yourself ((claimant's name)) once we've conducted today's appointment I'd like to book a further appointment with you so that we can look at more, at the vacancies and, and what help and support I can give you.</p> <p>Cla: Yeah, that's fine, yeah. [174; subsequent LP]</p> |
| <i>Task 7.19: Agreeing the steps a New Jobseeker will take to find work</i> | |
| <p>PA: Right. So all I'm asking you is on the day you're in here to sign on anyway (.) if you could use the job points:. see if there's any jobs. Okay, .tchh (.) Ehm: (.) We would expect that you would (.) contact at least two employers a week. (0.1) and contact us twice a week using (those) methods he[re.</p> <p>Cla: [Mm. [050; NJI 18-24]</p> | <p>PA: You've got three options basically. You can either phone up and get a job search done on: using what we call Jobseeker Direct. .hh You can come in and use the jobpoints whenever you want. Erm or alternatively you could use the internet... which one of those three options would be the better one for you. For for searching our database of jobs.</p> <p>Cla: Probably coming here and looking on the computer...</p> <p>PA: And how often do you think you are likely to do that.</p> <p>(1.1)</p> <p>Cla: Erm (0.5) I can do it like once a week. Or something. Or twice a week.</p> <p>PA: Okay [078; NJI 18-24]</p> |

The final comparison (Task 7.20) is a little different in that the claimant in the second example has already expressed a clear interest in joining the Condition Management Programme before the adviser asks *would you like to do it*. So it is not on the adviser's initiative that the claimant agrees, there and then, to participate. However, the contrast clearly illustrates the distinction between simply providing information about available options – which, as the left-hand example illustrates, may be rather overwhelming for the claimant – and using the WFI as an opportunity actually to refer the claimant to a programme in which they are interested.

| Process-led approach | Claimant-focused approach |
|---|---|
| <i>Task 7.18: Discussing the Condition Management Programme with IB claimants</i> | |
| Pa: Right, we do run um, a really good programme at the minute through the NHS in conjunction with Job Centre called Condition Management Programme, um basically to help you understand and manage your condition... | ((the adviser is part-way through explaining CMP)) |
| Cla: I think ((another adviser)) gave me a lot of | PA: Drawing up a po:sitive hea:lth statement to put on job applicat[ions is quite |
| PA: Has she mentioned that to you before then? | Cla: [Mm |
| Cla: She gave me a lot of information. | PA: usefu[l |
| ... | Cla: [Yea::h |
| Cla: Yeah, I mean there, there was an awful lot of information that she gave me, there was sort of pages of it. | (0.2) |
| PA: Yeah you'd maybe not take it all in straightaway. | PA: .tch [and wo:rking- |
| Cla: Yeah. | Cla: [How- how- do I get- |
| PA: Um yeah, so we do run this programme... a lot of people do find that a beneficial part of the programme meeting other people. | (0.2) how would I[: |
| Cla: Yeah. | PA: [Well |
| PA: And things like that does help people with their condition, | if you want to go on i::t |
| so that's available to you. | [I- a:ll you have to |
| Cla: Right. | Cla: [Mm |
| PA: If that's something you want to think about. | PA: do is <u>tell</u> me and I'll refer you to them |
| Cla: Right, thank you [177; Initial IB] | Cla: Yeah I'd- I'd- (.) quite like [to do tha:t |
| | PA: [Would you <u>li:ke</u> to [do i:t, |
| | Cla: [Yeah |
| | PA: Oh we can do that |
| | no:[:w |
| | Cla: [(Oh right) brilliant [127; Initial IB] |

7.5 Risks of a process-led approach: missed opportunities

A central implication of many of the above contrasts is that a process-led approach risks **missing opportunities** for supporting the claimant's back-to-work journey, which may well have been followed up effectively had the adviser been more focused on the individual. Drawing on examples from across this report, we can see that advisers may, when taking a process-led approach, miss opportunities to:

- **obtain crucial parts of the claimant's story** by focusing too narrowly on the standard questions and not providing enough space for claimants to talk in their own terms. This is evident in the numerous cases where important information was only revealed late in the WFI, after most of the core tasks were completed, and often only at the claimant's initiative. For example: that the claimant already has an interview (Section 3.3.4); that she will need help with childcare if she undertakes training (Section 5.4.3); or that the claimant is considering a job goal which is not listed on the JSAg (Section 3.3.1);

- **provide appropriate, tailored help and support.** Failure to elicit the claimant's story has a potential knock-on effect for a wide range of tasks in the WFI because knowledge about the claimant's personal circumstances can serve as a basis for tailoring the help on offer to fit the claimant's needs. Standardised information provision, as we have seen, risks failing to address claimants' individual concerns, difficulties, and goals;
- **gain claimants' commitment to action points.** Standardised information provision, on its own, also risks missing opportunities to get claimants 'signed up' to a work-directed course of action. Expecting claimants to take the initiative to follow up opportunities after the interview means that some may never engage with a particular service even though it might have been of use;
- **inspire claimants to do what it takes to become job ready – sooner rather than later.** As we have seen, a process-led approach is strongly associated with minimising – and, in the case of lone parents and IB claimants, even deferring – work-directed activity. When focusing on the requirements for claiming benefit, advisers miss opportunities to inspire claimants to think aspirationally, to think about the steps they may take towards their goals, and to be proactive in undertaking these.

Missed opportunities are particularly apparent in cases where the adviser takes a process-led approach, but the claimant does not. The following extract from a lone parent interview is striking because the claimant has taken the initiative: she has asked for an appointment in order to discuss her training options. Indeed, she is thinking in terms of 'stepping stones' towards work – she wants to 'build on' her skills while her children are still very young. In this case, the claimant is already 'sold' on the kinds of services/activities that an adviser might offer her.

Yet the adviser assumes, despite the claimant's explicit request for advice (lines 16-23), that she has come in because she thinks she is required to, rather than because she wants help with finding an appropriate course. His primary focus here is on the process: he can add the information about her wanting to undergo training to her records. By contrast, her primary focus is on her back-to-work journey: she wants to do an IT course that will fit around her childcare responsibilities. Although he does go on to provide some suggestions, he fails almost entirely to build on the claimant's enthusiasm, to encourage her proactivity, or to provide the concrete information she is seeking.

Extract 7.1 [096] Initial NDLP WFI (Oct 07)

1 Cla: What I'd like to do is an IT course .hh but you can
2 eh^m obviously I've got two children. I've got one in full
3 time education 'n then I've got another one that's like
4 part tim[e? It's three half days a week so i[t's awkward
5 PA: [Yeah [Yeah
6 Cla: for me really to go out to work, [.hhhh So I thought
7 PA: [Mm.
8 Cla: instead of going out to wo[rk <me build on my skills.
9 PA: [.hhhhh
10 Cla: But have a course> whereas I can go and learn slo[w,
11 PA: [.tch Oh
12 yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. .hhhh
13 Cla: and as I go so; .hhh
14 PA: >So what was it you were-< Have you seen anything that
15 you were wanting to try and do,
((lines omitted during which the claimant tries to remember the name
of a course her friend is attending))
16 Cla: Is there a course that I can go on like soon. or when
17 (0.1) *a*-one starts up whereas >.hh< I can eh^m: (1.6)
18 say work as I go if you see what I mean like I can go
19 in a couple of hours in the morning when
20 my da[ughter's at pre-
21 PA: [daughter- (at
22 right yeah)
23 Cla: school then .hh
24 (1.3)
25 PA: >Have you got a computer at home< have you or something
26 *o*r[:
27 Cla: [No I h[aven't. No.
28 PA: [No: . No.
29 (2.5)
30 Cla: But I think (with) these days. most things are technical
30 you see, so if you don't .hh have technical skills 'on
31 the computer then
32 (3.6)
33 PA: .hh Cuz the other thing I was wondering was: .hh Eh^m
34 (0.8) .lh Why you kind of- (.) kind of- d- >do you feel
35 as though you got to ask permission< to do it, do you
36 think or[:
37 Cla: [.hhh No I thought you'd have to: speak to the
38 lone parent advisor. fir[st. .hh before (.) you go on a
39 PA: [.hh
40 (0.4)
41 Cla: course you see,
42 PA: >I mean tha- that's g-< (0.3) >Obviously (we bits) nice
43 to know that we- you-you< want [to up- update us and
44 Cla: [Yeah Yeah
45 PA: s*tuff*,>.hh and I mean I can certainly add that< on here
46 to show (thus:). >cuz I mean< we've seen you several
47 times,
48 Cla: Yeah.
49 PA: .hhh >But () you don't have to< ask permission to do
50 something like this. you just go ahead and (.) and do
51 it,=
52 Cla: =Right.
53 (0.2)

54 PA: .hh But- >.h< (1.4) You- your friend who started this
 55 week (0.5) e[hm:
 56 Cla: [Cuz (I would) just wanted to find out the
 57 information about it you s[ee, and what courses are
 58 PA: [Right
 59 Cla: running. =I didn't have this, [you see,
 60 PA: [.tch us
 61 Cla: so .hh and whereas ehm she started. >even though she's<
 62 on that IT course there might be something else
 63 [that I'd prefer.
 64 PA: [Yeah. Yeah.

7.5.1 A middle ground? Combining the two approaches

Although the above risks are significant, our findings do not imply that a process-led approach has no place in any WFI. Depending on what the adviser is aiming to accomplish, a process-led approach may be most appropriate. For example, if the goal is to gather basic information or to complete a task that depends on specific answers to preset questions (such as using a screening tool or completing a BOC), then a process-led approach is likely to be most effective for two reasons: it may take less time, and it is more likely to ensure that all the relevant information is gathered because it is a more structured, adviser-directed approach. If, however, the goal is to get the claimant to explore some aspect of their back-to-work journey, then a claimant-focused approach is likely to be more effective.⁴¹ This is because it allows advisers to open up more 'slots' for claimants to talk about their history, current circumstances, needs, and future goals – in their own terms. One way of using the two approaches, then, is like one would use a toolkit: choose the appropriate tool for the job (i.e. choose the approach based on the type of task being performed).

There is also another way of combining the two approaches, which may be used in addition to this 'toolkit' approach: in some cases, it may be effective to conduct the same task in two different ways, using each approach. A clear example is information gathering in those WFIs where the adviser starts with a claimant-focused approach (e.g. by asking an open question about the claimant's circumstances), but then later switches to following the checklist of questions contained on the computer. In this way claimants are given an opportunity to tell

⁴¹ Facilitating claimants' efforts to 'think things through for themselves' has been shown to be important because it has been identified as effective for developing claimants' self-efficacy, which in turn has been shown to increase the likelihood of moving (back) into work (James, 2008).

their 'story' ⁴² and the adviser also ensures that all the key pieces of information are obtained.

More broadly, an effective WFI clearly depends on advisers managing both to 'follow the process' and to focus on the claimant. Failure to do the former would most likely result not only in a failure to meet the basic requirements of the WFI, but also to ensure that the interview retains its work focus. For example, as we saw in Section 6.7.2, NDLP interviews can sometimes get diverted from a work focus, perhaps due to a lack of clear agenda-setting by advisers. Yet this agenda-setting need not be at the expense of exploring the claimant's individual needs. As we saw in a contrasting example taken from an EZ WFI (Extract 6.4), EZ advisers tend to provide a clear structure to initial lone parent interviews by working through a list of possible services available to claimants. In this sense, these interviews may be seen as process-led. However, discussion of each option is usually closely tailored to the claimant's individual needs, with plenty of 'slots' created for the claimant to talk about their circumstances and goals – in their own terms. This is a particularly clear example of how a process-led and claimant-focused approach may be combined to maintain a degree of structure without losing the focus on the individual.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked across the different claimant groups in order to focus on a central theme running throughout the report: that despite the numerous constraints within which all advisers work, any task in the WFI (even when largely computer-based) may be carried out in different ways; how advisers conduct the WFI is not fully determined. Crucially, our analyses have shown a central distinction in **adviser approach** to WFI tasks: advisers may take a more process-led or a more claimant-focused approach.

The tables of contrastive examples in this chapter show some alternative forms of wording, exemplifying how these different approaches may be applied to the same task. Taken from real life recordings, they show how advisers have actually dealt with the tasks of the WFI – rather than an idealised version of how they might do so. They are also highly detailed, rather than generalised guidelines for what advisers might say. As such, they might usefully supplement adviser training programmes.

However, as we have found when presenting our findings to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus staff, the contrast between a process-led

⁴² There is evidence from work on doctor-patient interaction that starting the interview with an open question is related to greater patient satisfaction. In turn, this has been shown to: *'increase patients' level of physical functioning and adherence to medical recommendations, and to decrease patients' levels of doctor shopping and malpractice litigation'* (Robinson and Heritage, 2006: 283).

and adviser-focused approach raises a central policy question, namely: what is the main function of the WFI? Is it primarily to administer the benefits system (essentially a 'policing' role), or to support the claimant's individual back-to-work journey (essentially a 'counselling' role)? Or should it be (some combination of) both? And if so, to what extent is it realistic to do both in a single interview? Just what advisers should be trained to do will depend on the answers to such questions.

8 Summary of findings and recommendations

8.1 Aims and approach

The principal aims of this in-depth, qualitative study of the interaction in Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were to:

- contribute to the evidence base regarding what actually takes place in WFIs;
- identify those techniques and styles used by advisers during WFIs that seemed to be most effective in moving people closer to work;
- make recommendations concerning effective practice in WFIs, for three main claimant groups.

The study also included a comparison of Jobcentre Plus and Employment Zone (EZ) WFIs for specific cohorts, with a view to seeing if any lessons might be learned from advisory practice in a different context.

Our focus throughout has been on advisers' **communication strategies, styles or techniques** for managing the various **tasks** that comprise each of the distinct WFI types recorded for this study. These recordings include the following claimant groups:

- lone parents claiming Income Support (IS);
- people claiming an incapacity benefit due to ill health or disability; and
- people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) while unemployed.

The aim was not to assess individual advisers, nor to select those who were most successful in order to identify what techniques lay behind their success. Previous experience (for example in a study of police emergency call takers) has taught us that the same individual would do some things that were effective and other things that were less effective, during the same WFI; or would use one technique in performing a particular task in one WFI, but a different technique for the same

task on another occasion. Our approach was therefore systematic (not selective). Using the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA), we examined all instances of particular interactional activities (such as asking about job goals) in order to identify the different techniques advisers actually use in their day-to-day work. We then tracked whether the interaction proceeded differently when one or another form or technique was used. Our aim was to see which techniques were **demonstrably** more effective at helping claimants move closer to the labour market – within the WFI itself.

Indicators of effectiveness for this study needed, therefore, to be internal to the interaction if we were to address the study's objectives. We focused especially on claimants' responses to advisers' strategies because positive or conducive responses are signs of – and preconditions for – progression during the WFI along the journey to work. By contrast, negative or resistive responses tend to delay or block such progress. By focusing both on the differences in how advisers manage WFI tasks (like asking questions or delivering information) and on how claimants respond to these different strategies, we have a method for assessing **directly** what 'makes the difference' **within** the WFI.

In this chapter we first outline the key specific findings on effective practice for each of the main Jobcentre Plus WFI types covered by the study. We then focus on effective practice recommendations that cut across the different claimant groups. Finally, we outline some connections that our findings might have to policy issues that are currently being considered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

A caveat about our sample size: our observations and findings are based on recordings of a little over 180 WFIs, made between July 2007 and June 2008, in eight Jobcentre Plus offices and two EZs across four regions of England, selected by DWP. This is a relatively large sample for an in-depth qualitative study of communication techniques, but a relatively small sample of the many hundreds of thousands of WFIs conducted across the country each week. For instance, our sample of WFIs with IBs claimants is comparatively small (we recorded only seven of the 300 specialist IBPAs in Jobcentre Plus-led areas across the country); therefore the cases and examples shown here may not be typical or representative of the approach of all Incapacity Benefits Personal Advisers (IBPAs). Similarly, the WFIs we recorded across all the other claimant groups may not be (statistically) representative of all WFIs for all groups across the country. This may be regarded as a limiting factor, so far as contributing to the evidence base of what takes place in WFIs (although it may be supposed that since the advisers who took part volunteered to do so, they are likely to represent, disproportionately, those advisers who are more confident). However, any limitations there may be in terms of the representativeness of our sample is less prejudicial to the (principal) aim of this study, which was to identify **what works best** – to identify effective practice in WFIs by comparing the different verbal techniques PAs use; and identifying which of these is most likely to result in claimants taking steps or otherwise being moved closer towards work, **during the interview itself**. Moreover, we should emphasise that when we have presented these findings to stakeholders, they have recognised the picture we draw of WFIs as essentially correct and valid.

8.2 Principal findings on effective practice for specific Jobcentre Plus claimant groups

8.2.1 Introduction

In this section we present the key findings on effective practice for each of the main Jobcentre Plus WFI types covered by the study. For each type we focused on those activities that seemed most salient in the recordings; we were also guided by the research questions agreed with DWP and by ongoing discussions with DWP and Jobcentre Plus stakeholders. Hence, our core findings – which are specific to each claimant group – address aspects of Jobcentre Plus WFIs that reflect as far as possible what stakeholders told us they were most interested in learning from our study, and what would be most useful to them.

The principal findings relating to each claimant group are summarised in this section as follows:

- New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) with JSA 18-24 and 25+ claimants;
- initial WFIs with IB claimants in Pathways to Work areas;
- mandatory initial and review WFIs with lone parents claiming IS.

8.2.2 NJIs with JSA 18-24 and 25+ claimants

- When advisers ask about a claimant's job goals, effective practice consisted in phrasing the enquiry in a more open-ended, claimant-focused format (e.g. *'What would you like to do?'*).
- Taking a claimant-focused approach to job goals typically involved encouraging claimants to think fully about job goals; to help claimants match their goals to their qualifications, experience and aptitudes; and to choose second and third job goals which, whilst being realistic, were also related – preferably as stepping stones – to their main goal.
- When asking claimants about their job goals, advisers sometimes took the view that some job goals were unrealistic – without having first explored this explicitly with the claimant. Effective practice consisted in asking relevant questions (e.g. if claimants knew of local vacancies or had already made any applications) to establish the realism of claimants' goals, rather than making assumptions.
- When talking about job search strategies, advisers commonly provided information in a standardised way that did not address claimants' individual needs. A more effective approach was to tailor information to an individual claimant, by first learning more about, for instance, what they had already done to look for work

- By framing their explanations of job search strategies around the conditionality of receiving benefit, advisers tended often to minimise what claimants were expected to do to search for and find work. Effective practice involved discussing with claimants the difficulties they had experienced with previous job search strategies, and ways in which they could be more pro-active in searching for work.
- Explicitly inviting claimants to commit to taking specific steps towards work was more effective than simply telling them about job search options.
- Conducting a job search with the claimant provided an opportunity to give claimant-focused, tailored instruction and encouragement, including the support they needed to make suitable applications.

8.2.3 Initial WFIs with IB claimants in Pathways to Work areas

The data collection for this study took place before the replacement of IB with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in October 2008. Since then, the use of the screening tool to assess eligibility for the Pathways Programme has been discontinued. We should emphasise, though, that despite such changes, and the screening tool no longer being part of initial WFIs for this claimant group, our observations about certain communicational tasks and difficulties, and our recommendations for effective practice in overcoming those difficulties, will continue to be relevant. These difficulties apply more widely, so that even if procedures change, advisers have nevertheless to manage many of the same communicational tasks (e.g. explaining the differences between the mandatory and voluntary aspects of a programme); our recommendations apply therefore to these wider communicational tasks.

- Despite having received a letter and (usually) a telephone call, IB claimants often remained uncertain about the purpose of the interview. IBPAs frequently struggled to provide clear explanations at the start of the WFI. In overcoming this difficulty, explanations seemed most effective when they conformed to three principles: **simplicity, staging and tailoring**.
- IBPAs' accounts of the agenda for the initial WFI were complicated by the fact that they did not know yet whether or not the claimant would be screened in for the Pathways programme; they therefore had difficulty in explaining which aspects of Pathways WFIs were mandatory and which were voluntary. Our findings support the policy decision to remove the need to use a screening tool.
- IBPAs often did not emphasise – at least, in their opening explanations – the real opportunities Pathways to Work offered. They did not 'sell' Pathways; rather they conveyed, particularly when announcing the screening result, that Pathways was something of a 'penalty'. By contrast, the news that the claimant had been screened in was more effectively presented as offering the claimant **an opportunity** to receive further help and support. Although the screening tool is no longer in use, the value of using the 'language of opportunity', rather than of penalty and imposition, is applicable to any occasion where advisers are informing claimants of voluntary programmes.

- IBPAs' attempts to focus on claimants' plans or intentions to return to work were frequently 'deflected' by claimants, who took these enquiries as further opportunities to elaborate on their medical conditions or other complaints (for example, about their treatment by an employer or agency).
- IBPAs tended, in these initial interviews, to focus on gathering and giving information; resulting in the postponement of further steps towards work until some point in the future (subsequent meetings, if screened in, or until the health condition had been resolved). In some cases this meant they missed opportunities to respond positively to claimants' expressions of interest in the possibility of retraining. Effective practice consisted in talking with claimants about the steps towards work they might take in the meantime – even if a return to work was not imminent.

8.2.4 Mandatory initial and review WFI with lone parents claiming IS

- In initial WFIs, claimants generally responded to the results of a Better Off Calculation (BOC) in a non-committal or 'negative' manner (however much better off they would be). BOCs appear to receive more positive responses, however, in review meetings. The key difference seems to lie in claimants' job-readiness: if claimants are already seeking work (or about to do so), the BOC can help contribute towards an increased work focus; if not, the BOC does not appear to encourage claimants to begin to think about returning to work. Effective practice may lie, then, in enabling advisers to use BOCs flexibly, depending on the claimant's circumstances.
- Explanations of better-off calculations were most effective when tailored to claimants' particular circumstances and **how they might help claimants** (and not as something '*we have to do*').
- Information about programmes, assistance and benefits available, were often not **tailored** to what the claimant had said about their circumstances. Claimants responded more positively to information that related or was fitted to their work aspirations, or childcare needs.
- Claimants' answers to an initial enquiry did not always fully or accurately reflect their circumstances or childcare needs. Subsequent follow-up questions, perhaps approaching the matter from a different angle, sometimes elicited more positive and fruitful responses.
- When enquiries about claimants' work plans were framed around whether they were looking for work **at the present**, claimants' responses were typically negative. By contrast, when the same enquiry was framed around intentions **for the future**, the response was generally positive. The latter provided a more conducive environment in which to go on to discuss steps towards work.

- Even if claimants indicated initially that they were not actively seeking work, it was possible to move the discussion on to goals for the future, and then consider what preparation might be necessary to achieve those goals. Framing plans for the future provided an opportunity, then, for advisers to encourage claimants to consider work as something for which they may need **to prepare** themselves, even if they were not yet ready for work.
- By using positive and constructive reformulations of claimants' rather negative views about their interest in and likelihood of finding work, advisers can open up opportunities to discuss future work plans (work-related openings).
- An 'information only' approach was less successful in 'caseloading' claimants than combining information provision with an explicit invitation to claimants to consider participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP).

8.3 Cross-cutting findings on effective practice

8.3.1 Introduction

As outlined above, this study included a range of claimant groups and WFI types. Different tasks, activities, aims and programmes were associated with each of the WFI types. In addition, some WFIs were voluntary, some mandatory, for some we were asked to examine initial interviews only, and for others we were asked to examine both initial and subsequent meetings. As we show in Chapter 7, however, a principal theme running through many of our findings – cutting across different claimant groups and WFI types – is the distinction between a **process-led** and **claimant-focused** approach to WFI tasks. This distinction is closely related to the key findings from our comparison of WFIs in Jobcentre Plus and EZs, namely that advisers in EZs tend to be more **collaborative, directive, proactive, positive** and **challenging** in how they manage interactions with claimants; these features may be understood as different aspects of a more claimant-focused approach.

In this section, we focus first on these **broad** cross-cutting themes. We then conclude this summary of our findings on effective practice by focusing on more **specific** recommendations. Our methodology for examining the verbal conduct of advisers and claimants in close detail has enabled us to identify precisely how advisers 'construct' their utterances – what words and phrases they use when conducting a particular task. Thus, in many cases we have been able to identify specific forms of words that appear to be more effective. Many of these recommendations are transferrable across WFI types. We provide, therefore, a summary table (Table 8.1), listing some of the key effective practice recommendations identified in this study with illustrations of wording taken from actual WFIs. These should, however, be considered in conjunction with the specific recommendations summarised in Section 8.2 for each claimant group.

8.3.2 Process-led and claimant-focused approaches to tasks in WFIs

A principal theme running through many of these findings concerns the extent to which advisers performed tasks in ways that were process-led, or which took into account the circumstances, needs and accounts of a particular claimant, i.e. were claimant-focused.

This distinction applied particularly to gathering and giving information. When advisers gathered information according to a checklist provided by questions on the screen, and entered that information in ways that excluded or were opaque to claimants, they were adopting a process-led approach. By contrast, when they asked more open questions inviting the claimant's 'story', and involved claimants in playing an active role in recording this information, they were more claimant-focused. Likewise, when advisers provided information and advice about the steps claimants might take towards work, and the incentives, programmes and work-directed services that were available, they mainly did this in a standardised fashion; less often, they tailored the information to the individual claimant's circumstances and needs. Our findings suggest that a more tailored approach to information provision is more effective in engaging claimants and encouraging them to take steps towards work.

The distinction between process-led and claimant-focused was also associated with whether advisers simply delivered the relevant information (for example, about how a claimant might search for work or what support was available); or whether they provided information **and** explicitly invited the claimant to commit to performing some activity, thereby seeking their commitment to taking steps towards work. In general, a process-led approach tended to be associated with advisers minimising what claimants were expected to do in order to become job-ready. By contrast, a claimant-focused approach was typically associated with advisers seeking to encourage claimants to think constructively (and aspirationally) about their future employment.

Our findings do not, however, support the exclusive adoption of one or other of these approaches. There is no evidence that adviser conduct would be more effective if they were only and always claimant-focused; it seems that some combination of these approaches might necessarily be adopted by advisers, depending on the task they are managing at the time. Nonetheless, there is evidence that advisers were more likely to **miss opportunities** to support claimants when they adopted a predominantly process-led approach. More specifically, it seems that advisers sometimes missed opportunities when they:

- spent relatively little time soliciting the claimant's 'story';
- gave (further) information about programmes and schemes that were available in a relatively 'formulaic' manner (i.e. not tailored to an individual's circumstances), rather than explicitly inviting or actively soliciting the claimant's participation in a programme;

- adopted a 'wait and see' attitude – effectively postponing taking active steps towards work until later ('later' might include subsequent meetings; or until the claimant's circumstances changed).

8.3.3 Adviser style

Our comparison of WFIs in Jobcentre Plus and EZ offices highlighted the importance of certain key aspects of adviser style that run through all WFIs, with all claimant groups. Advisers were demonstrably more effective when they were more:

- **collaborative** in their approach to the interview, treating the relationship with the claimant as a partnership;
- **directive**, guiding the interview agenda, and providing explicit instruction to claimants on a range of practical matters, such as CV construction, what to wear to an interview, how to answer interview questions, and how to find suitable childcare;
- **proactive**, pursuing employment and training opportunities there and then during the interview, and ensuring that they followed claimants up (e.g. with a phone call later in the week);
- **positive** about the claimant, for example highlighting marketable skills;
- **challenging**, requiring claimants to engage actively in job seeking, and encouraging them to think differently about their situation.

Although these features were more characteristic of EZ interviews, they were also evident, to some extent, in Jobcentre Plus WFIs; indeed, they are closely related to the claimant-focused approach, which was identified on the basis of our analysis of adviser practices in Jobcentre Plus alone. For example, explicitly inviting claimants to take up a training opportunity is both an example of a more claimant-focused approach and of being more proactive. Similarly, when Jobcentre Plus advisers took a claimant-focused approach, they were typically more directive and challenging (e.g. they might encourage claimants to join numerous employment agencies, rather than simply reminding them of the basic requirement to be 'actively seeking' work). Thus, although the broader institutional context is very different for advisers working in Jobcentre Plus and the EZ, our findings suggest that many of the effective interactional strategies commonly seen in EZ interviews are transferrable to – and indeed already used in – Jobcentre Plus WFIs.

8.3.4 Specific, cross-cutting recommendations (with illustrative examples)

The findings in this report contribute a **greater level of detail** to the recommendations that may be made to advisers than is possible on the basis of non-observational research methods. It is common for interactional skills training – in a range of institutional settings – to offer guidance about general communication skills; e.g. active listening; asking rather than telling claimants; asking open rather than closed questions; summarising and turning issues back

to claimants; the tactical use of silences and so on. Our findings add to those guidelines levels of detail about what advisers actually say and do in the effective performance of WFI tasks.

In order to highlight the detail of the recommendations about effective practice arising from our study, we show here, in tabular form, a sample of recommendations with illustrative examples. The 'headline' recommendation is summarised in the left column; and examples of the kind of phrasing that seems to be most effective are shown in the right column. Although some of the content will relate to specific claimant groups, the strategies themselves are transferrable across different WFI types.

This summary is not comprehensive; it is only a sample of some of the headline recommendations. This should be read, then, in conjunction with the specific recommendations outlined in Section 8.2. Furthermore, in considering this sample it should be noted that not all recommendations made across this report are amenable to such brief summary and illustration.

Table 8.1 Sample of recommended effective practice

| Recommended effective practice | Examples |
|---|--|
| Explicitly invite claimants to commit to steps towards work, rather than just giving information | <i>Is it fair to say that you'll go and visit them...When do you think you'll have done that by?</i> |
| When asking about claimant's job goals, use claimant-focused enquiry | <i>So what is your main job goal going to be um uh a shop operative retail operative, what would you like to do?</i> |
| Explain secondary job goals as steps towards principal job goal | <i>It's like a springboard for you isn't it, to do something like that. You know hopefully you're gonna get the job that you want to do straight away but rather than saying 'well I'm signing on at the minute' you're working in the (names area) cos applying for work out of area is som- the employer sometimes worries er is he gonna be ab- he's gonna need to be rehoused he's got all these issues. Can he do it. And you need to put in a good covering letter in saying that you've got accommodation already set up. So if you get a job in (area) you're on your way to your career</i> |
| Enquire about lone parents' plans to work in the future (not 'at the moment') | <i>And have you got any plans to go back to work in the future?</i> |

Continued

Table 8.1 Continued

| Recommended effective practice | Examples |
|---|---|
| Encourage claimants to be proactive in searching for work (avoid minimising what they have to do, as in 'So all you have to do is ...') | <p>Okay what I'd also like you to do is erm find additional vacancies stroke application forms for the next appointment. We just need to get a little bit more proactive... and it's important because even if they don't have anything at the moment you can hand them a CV, get a bit of a conversation with them...</p> <p>You're gonna go and visit (service name) by the end of the week. And find out whether they know of anything in the area. Erm you're also gonna make an appointment with (names company) to discuss erm construction training available. Erm it sounds as though you're doing a regular internet search...</p> |
| In response to claimants' 'blocking' moves (responding negatively to certain opportunities), respond with alternative perspectives that challenge claimants' disinclination | <p>Cl: There's no one to pick him up. I ain't got no-one to pick him up, so no not, really.</p> <p>PA: Yeah. The way I would turn that around is that the fact like someone like myself who works full time with children I'm in the same boat as yourself ... if you looked at sixteen hours a week and spread it out throughout the week it's a few hours within school hours a week.</p> |
| Positive and constructive formulations of what claimants have said, or of their circumstances, are more likely to open up opportunities to discuss future work plans. Use positive formulations or constructions of claimants' responses, even when the responses have been broadly negative | <p>Asked about 'the possibilities of work', claimant answered 'At the minute there's not a chance'. PA responds immediately 'Right so the only thing I'd look at with you then is ehmm long term you were saying you wanted to look at the care assistant...'</p> |
| Describe programmes as opportunities , not as penalties | <p>How would you feel at this moment in time (claimant's name) me sort of helping you find the right type of job to match your circumstances now by you being put on my caseload?</p> |
| Approach all aspects of the WFI as a collaboration , a partnership, with the claimant | <p>If we're gonna develop this fifty-fifty relationship, this partnership, in trying to find you work, obviously we're gonna be doing a lot of work for you as well, but if you've got, we've got your buy-in and if you're committed to finding work as well, obviously that you're gonna enjoy, that helps us a great deal ...</p> |

Continued

Table 8.1 Continued

| Recommended effective practice | Examples |
|--|---|
| Encourage claimants to be aspirational in job goals (consistent with their qualifications, experience and aptitudes) | <i>What you don't wanna do is sell yourself short because these leadership skills and these management skills and all this is really really gonna be important to the next employer</i> |
| Claimants are often uncertain about what they should do (over a range of matters). It helps to be directive , in guiding them in what they should be doing to look for work, or what they should wear at an interview (see also proactive , above) | <i>If possible bring me in the jobs so if it's from the Jobcentre or from the internet bring me the printouts and then I can put that in your file to show what you've been doing and that demonstrates you're looking for work, outside of your appointments. Now how are you fixed for interview clothes, if I said to you we've got you an interview next week and you've got to wear shirt trousers shoes..as long as you've got a nice smart shirt and trousers...</i> |
| Encourage claimants to consider work not simply as something that is 18 months or two years away, but as something for which claimants may need to prepare themselves | <i>What we'd normally look at is, is there anything you can be doing in the meantime to get yourself prepared for that so that you know when the time's right you've got the best chance of getting the sort of work you want to do..</i> |
| Explain BOCs as assisting claimants, for their particular circumstances – not as <i>'something we have to do'</i> | <i>..we're gonna do a better off calculation for you. And I can do this calculation on the minimum sixteen hours but it will show you how much better off you can be claiming Working Tax Credit so even though you're doing really well and you're trying to better yourself by taking advantage of the time you've got at home to go and do further studying so that's gonna be really good to get qualifications.. but by doing your one day studying while your children are at school if you were able to do sixteen hours a week</i> |
| Highlight claimants' skills and experience and therefore employability | <i>Okay so your communication skills, your ability to sell to people, your IT skills are being used so this is all in your transferable skills, all being encompassed into one kind of job and you get training from day one.. ...but what you've got to remember (claimant's name) is that you've got a lot to offer an employer. Employers aren't necessarily after huge amounts of qualifications. They want people who are honest, people who are reliable, and you've got those qualifications...</i> |

Continued

Table 8.1 Continued

| Recommended effective practice | Examples |
|--|--|
| Tailor information to claimants' particular circumstances (avoiding a formulaic approach) | <i>For the type of work you're looking for the butcher and the factory worker in particular, you really need to think about registering with some agencies because a lot of work goes through agencies</i> |
| Use forms that presume claimant will be working/looking for work – avoid forms that presume otherwise (i.e. avoid forms such as 'Are you thinking about trying to do anything probably not yet?') | <i>An' when you get back to work, what would you like to see yourself doin' have you given it any thought?</i> <i>What would you like to do um if they for example if they give you the medical retirement</i> |
| In doing job searches, encourage claimants to take a positive view about advertised job opportunities (avoid dismissing as "probably not for you") | <i>I think that would be great for you to erm it gets you into the area you want to get into it's a higher starting salary than we've already agreed...</i> |
| Take opportunities to take steps towards work then and there, during the WFI – avoid deferring | <i>D'you want to give them a call while you're here just to find out whether they can take him</i> <i>I can book you onto a course called the Gateway to Work course. Which is a two week course event run by (names company)...I'm gonna book you onto that first course...</i> <i>PA: Would you like to do it?</i> <i>Cla: Yeah</i> <i>PA: Oh we can do that now</i> |

8.4 Key policy messages

8.4.1 Context – aims of the study

The principal objectives of this study to contribute to the evidence base regarding what actually takes place in adviser-claimant interactions in WFIs; to identify those techniques and styles employed by advisers during WFIs that seemed to be most effective in moving people closer to work; and to make recommendations concerning effective practice in WFIs, for each of the claimant groups. Thus, the major output of our study is recommendations about effective practice; from the evidence we have collected (the video recordings) we have attempted to identify what techniques work best, in progressing claimants towards work-related activities or employment itself. Our findings concerning effective practice have, perhaps, most significance for training; they may contribute to the training that advisers already receive, aimed at improving the quality of the service they deliver. We were not asked by DWP to address the possible policy implications of our study and findings; nor were we asked to link our findings to any strategic level policy developments within DWP and Jobcentre Plus. Any strategy and policy

implications there may be are properly matters for DWP to consider, in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus, which delivers the WFI service.

Nevertheless, it might be appropriate to point to some connections that our findings have to policy issues that are currently being considered by DWP – particularly in the context of its review of its advisory services, the changes being introduced to give frontline advisers a greater degree of flexibility over the timing and content of some WFIs, and the attempts being made to tailor services as far as possible to the individual claimant.

Rather than suggest policy implications, we prefer to describe these connections as policy **messages**. These are issues that arise from our study, which we think connect with DWP's ongoing consideration of how best to improve its Jobcentre Plus advisory service. Moreover, they are connections that DWP personnel have sometimes made when we have presented our emerging findings to groups of DWP and Jobcentre Plus colleagues responsible for specific claimant groups.

The policy connections or messages arising from this study that are perhaps most salient, are the balance and sometimes tension between explaining the mandatory aspects of benefit entitlement (conditionality), and helping claimants to take steps towards getting back to work (Section 8.4.2); the drive to offer tailor-made, individualised advice and support to claimants (Section 8.4.3); training and learning and development (Section 8.4.4); implementing our recommendations about effective practice in adviser techniques (Section 8.4.5); and the implications for external delivery of employment services (Section 8.4.6).

8.4.2 The balance between conditionality and work-focus

It is evident in the WFIs we recorded, particularly for JSA claimants, and to a lesser extent also in some others, that advisers sometimes experience difficulties balancing, on the one hand, the requirement to inform claimants about mandatory aspects of their attendance at Jobcentre Plus, their availability for work, and to be actively seeking work; with, on the other hand, encouraging claimants in their efforts to find work that is, wherever possible, compatible with their experience, training and aptitudes. The purpose of the WFI is to discuss a claimant's work prospects and offer help and advice, by exploring the claimants' job goals; their skills, strengths and abilities; factors preventing the claimant finding work, and how those barriers might be overcome; and other ideas, issues and problems the claimant may have. The evidence from our study is clear – that overwhelmingly, advisers do pursue this work-focused purpose and goal of WFIs. However, they sometimes have difficulty balancing matters of conditionality with offering personalised advice and support, for instance when explaining what is mandatory and what is voluntary; and they sometimes have difficulty explaining the difference between the mandatory minimum requirements of looking for work, and what claimants should really be doing to be proactive in their search for work. By design, WFIs merge two tasks or roles – that of administering aspects of the benefits system, with that of providing claimants help and guidance in looking for work. A question is how successfully

these twin functions or roles are combined in Jobcentre Plus WFIs; and whether the requirements associated with the 'administration' role/tasks create tensions and difficulties when combined with performing the more claimant-focused role of assisting claimants in their search for work.

8.4.3 Tailor-made, individualised advice and support for claimants

DWP and Jobcentre Plus are committed to providing a more personalised, individualised service to help people back into work. Recent policy statements have highlighted the aspiration to provide a **tailor-made** service to support claimants who may have different needs from one another and individual circumstances and barriers to work. Initiatives such as the Personalised Employment Programme being piloted (in 2009) in three Jobcentre Plus districts underline the commitment to providing more individualised information, advice and support. Some of our findings and recommendations suggest that there might be scope, within the existing framework of how WFIs are conducted, to enhance the tailored, individualised delivery of the advice and support advisers give claimants.

We have highlighted some of the differences between taking a process-driven approach in interviewing claimants, and what we have described as a more claimant-focused approach. Some aspects of the WFI are necessarily process-driven. Moreover, we have noted from time to time in this report that in certain phases of WFIs with certain claimant groups, there is no clear evidence that a process-driven approach is any less effective than one that is more claimant-focused. Nevertheless, there is also clear evidence that in some respects, a claimant-focused approach is more effective (e.g. tailoring information provision; exploring, more fully, a claimant's previous work experience and work opportunities; avoiding jumping to conclusions about what is and is not a realistic job goal; fitting job goals to a claimant's training, experience and aspirations; exploring fully a claimant's childcare needs and preferences). More generally, an approach that is content to 'tick the boxes' may, for instance, detract from exploring issues fully with claimants.

Some of our findings, therefore, connect with, and are relevant to, recent changes to Jobcentre Plus services aimed at delivering a more personalised, tailored programme of advice to support claimants towards work. Advisers are to be given greater flexibility in how they deliver WFIs, in order to accommodate and respond to individual claimants' circumstances and needs. PAs have to manage and complete a considerable number of tasks during a quite limited time period; greater flexibility in how they use that time might contribute to their adjusting the WFI to what needs to be covered with a given individual. In relation to flexibility, it is worth highlighting our finding that Jobcentre Plus advisers were able to give rather less practical advice and direct on-the-spot assistance to claimants, than were advisers in EZ offices. More resources and greater flexibility were available to EZ advisers, in comparison with Jobcentre Plus advisers. The effectiveness of EZ advisers was associated, to a certain extent, with their working collaboratively with claimants to construct their CVs – providing a focus around which advisers

could highlight aspects of a claimant's skills and experience that would be 'selling points' in job applications and interviews. In this way advisers encouraged in claimants a sense of 'self efficacy' during the WFI, motivating them to recognise how much more they had going for them than they initially thought (evidence for boosting self-efficacy during the interview), and indirectly instructing claimants in how to present themselves to potential employers. These issues align closely with strategies being developed within Jobcentre Plus to enhance claimants' self-efficacy in effective job seeking, and training employment advisers in how to boost claimants' self-efficacy in their search for work (see e.g. James and Booth 2008).

8.4.4 Training and learning and development

When at DWP workshops we have presented our emerging findings and shown (anonymised) extracts from recorded WFIs, Jobcentre Plus colleagues (particularly) have observed that advisers are trained specifically to avoid some aspect of the way in which an adviser is conducting the WFI, or that they have been trained to manage things differently. Their point has been that what they have seen in the video excerpts is not in accordance with the training Jobcentre Plus advisers receive. (When this study was commissioned by DWP, we were not asked to find out what level of training advisers had received. Our premise was in any case that effective practice was to be found, not in those individual advisers regarded as being particularly able, but across the practices of all advisers.) These responses and observations by Jobcentre Plus staff suggest that somehow advisers either have not fully absorbed the lessons from adviser training programmes, or that they are not fully implementing what they have learned in training. Either way, it is likely that our findings and recommendations have implications for adviser training, and for DWP/Jobcentre Plus approaches to learning and development. Wherever possible, our report specifies and recommends forms of words, techniques and strategies at a considerable level of detail, suitable for inclusion in training programmes.

8.4.5 Getting effective practice into practice

There are a number of ways in which lessons about effective practice can be passed down to frontline staff, most obviously through formal training, either of new staff or in continuing training for existing staff. However, effective practice can also be disseminated through other means such as networks of advisers, seminars and conferences, web-based information resources and others. And supervision and monitoring can serve to reinforce effective practice and identify where it is not happening. No single one of these approaches, or an over-reliance on one method, is likely to produce continuing improvements in practice. Rather, a combination of training and other forms of dissemination and reinforcement is likely to be a more productive way forward.

There is of course always a role for further research in this area. We are aware for example, that the types of WFI covered in this project did not include many subsequent interviews (particularly those towards the end of a series of Pathways interviews) and effectively excluded long-term claimants who had

been receiving benefit for a number of years (not quite). There is much still to be learned about how to promote effective practice in these different types of interaction.

However, an alternative to an immediate further research programme might be to encourage advisers to play a more active role in disseminating lessons they have learned from thinking about their practices and experiences. For example, they could be encouraged to identify forms of words or ways of talking to claimants that they find effective (or, conversely, ineffective). If this was done systematically, for example, being facilitated through some form of virtual network, then effective practices might be identified, disseminated and used comparatively quickly.

8.4.6 Personal Advisers (PAs) in external provider organisations

The findings from this project have been derived from interviews with staff in Jobcentre Plus offices and a smaller number of external provider organisations delivering EZ services. The current direction of policy suggests that the number of advisers in external organisations, delivering Provider-led Pathways to Work and the Flexible New Deal for example, may increase substantially in the near future.

One of the principles behind contracting out employment services is that DWP and Jobcentre Plus should not interfere in the day-to-day delivery of services, beyond ensuring compliance with contracts, and only be concerned with the results achieved. Under this so-called 'black box' approach there is an argument therefore that adviser-claimant interactions are not, and possibly should not be, the concern of Jobcentre Plus. However, if the overriding objective of welfare-to-work policy is to help people return to the labour market, then DWP and Jobcentre Plus do have an **interest** in promoting effective interactions, even if they do not have any direct control over those interactions. Moreover an increasingly significant partnership is developing between public and specialist private sector providers (see e.g. Bellis, Aston and Dewson, 2009).

There is a question for policy, therefore, about how the lessons from this project can influence adviser behaviour in external provider organisations in order to maximise the dissemination of examples of effective practice. Having said that, the component of the study that drew comparisons between Jobcentre Plus and EZ interviews suggests that the public sector provider, Jobcentre Plus, has something to learn from the diversity of approaches and delivery styles which are being developed within private and third sector employment services. At any rate, there is scope for considering how public and private sector adviser approaches and techniques might be mutually informed, and informative.

8.4.7 Final thoughts: Implications for advisers of benefit reform and economic downturn

Studies consistently show that the advisers' ability to convey appropriate information at the appropriate time, within a relationship of co-operation, respect and trust, plays a crucial role in helping move claimants forwards into work-related activity or into work itself. DWP recognises the significance of the relationship that advisers build with claimants, in providing a personalised and effective service that assists claimants actively to seek work. There is no doubt, therefore, about the key role played by advisers in the system and process of supporting claimants back into work. Nor is there any doubt about how highly valued – by claimants and DWP alike – the work of advisers is, as the principal means for helping and encouraging claimants in their efforts to rejoin the labour market.

The need for effective adviser practices is probably increasing due to two recent, unrelated developments: First, in 2008 Incapacity Benefit (IB) was replaced by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). As an intended consequence of this policy change the number of people claiming JSA has increased and can be expected to increase. Hence, not only will more JSA WFs be carried out in future, but many JSA claimants will have health conditions that previously would have qualified them for IB. More JSA advisers will therefore have to adopt communicative practices that engage with claimants who may be less willing to engage with work-related activity. They will also need to challenge – more often than in the past – possibly deeply held perceptions about capacity to work. Other changes in the benefits system, including the inclusion of lone parents into JSA, will further enhance the role of advisers, and make more demands on them in terms of encouraging claimants towards and back into work.

Secondly, the economic downturn that began in 2008 (and is continuing at the time of writing) has resulted in increases in claimants from particular employment sectors (such as financial services, manufacturing, construction and retail) who have strong work histories and skills. The reduction in job opportunities is also likely to reduce the chances of long-term claimants, and other claimants who are a long way from the labour market, finding work. Both these impacts of the economic downturn will require advisers to use ways of talking to claimants that encourage and maintain positive attitudes and motivation when their prospects of work in the short term might be poor.

These two developments have not necessarily generated the need to find completely new ways of talking to claimants. However, the task of talking to claimants will likely become more difficult and progress harder to achieve for possibly large numbers of people, at least until economic recovery generates an increased demand for labour.

Appendix A

Glossary of transcription conventions

The recordings are transcribed in considerable detail, to capture particularly aspects of the timing of speech (eg. overlapping speech, pauses within and between speakers' turns), and how things are said (including certain intonational features, emphasis, stretching of sounds and words). Although for presentational (and possibly training) purposes, transcriptions may be simplified, transcription symbols are used to reflect salient features of how people talk in WFIs. These are the main transcription symbols that we use to represent speech.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| PA/CI: | Speaker labels (PA: = Personal Adviser; CI = Claimant) |
| = | Links talk produced in very closely together (latched talk), but not quite overlapping |
| ° ° | Encloses talk which is spoken quietly |
| <u>underline</u> | Underlining is used to mark words or syllables which are given special emphasis (intonationally stressed) |
| CAPS | Words or parts of words spoken loudly marked in capital letters |
| s::: | Sustained or stretched sound; the more colons, the longer the sound |
| .hhh | Inbreath; the length of the inbreath is indicated by the number of <i>hs</i> |
| [] | Encloses talk produced in overlap, i.e. when both speakers are speaking simultaneously |
| (word) | Parentheses around word, phrases etc. indicate transcriber's uncertainty |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| () | Parentheses with no words etc. indicate transcriber hears that something is being said, but cannot make out what that is |
| (this/that) | Alternative hearings |
| ((description)) | Description of what can be heard, rather than transcription e.g. ((shuffling papers, baby crying, mobile phone etc. ringing)) |
| cu- | Cut-off word or sound |
| (0.6) | Silence in seconds |
| (.) | Silence of less than two tenths of a second |
| ^ | Marks high pitch (sometimes shown as arrows), thus |
| > < | Marks speeding up delivery (in talk between the facing arrows) |
| (hhh) | Indicates laughter while speaking (aspiration) |
| (24:55) | Time through interview (or excerpt) in minutes and seconds |

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